

**“NERDFIGHTERS, WE DID IT”:
Means of building a sense of community on the YouTube channel
*Vlogbrothers***

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract YouTube on tärkeä uusi ilmiö ja suosittu viihdekanava etenkin nuorten keskuudessa. YouTube-tähdet keräävät valtaisia yleisöjä, ja YouTube-kanavien ympärille on rakentunut myös tiiviitä nettiyhteisöjä. YouTube-yhteisöjen suosioista huolimatta ei niistä ole vielä tehty juurikaan tutkimusta, ja nettiyhteisöjen tutkimus onkin kohdistunut lähinnä tekstipohjaisiin yhteisöihin, kuten foorumeihin. Tutkielmani tarkoituksena on selvittää, kuinka YouTube videobloggaajat rakentavat yhteisöllisyyden tunnetta faniensa keskuudessa. Tutkimuskohteenani on YouTube-kanava <i>Vlogbrothers</i> , jolla on yli kaksi miljoonaa vakituista katsojaa ja jonka ympärille on rakentunut poikkeuksellisen tiivis kansainvälinen katsojayhteisö. Videodataa analysoimalla pyrin erottamaan erilaisia keinoja, joilla vloggaajat vahvistavat yhteisöllisyyden kokemusta omalla kanavallaan. Tarkastelussani selvisi, että <i>Vlogbrothers</i> -kanavan pitäjät rakentavat yhteisöllisyyttä muun muassa pyrkimällä luomaan yhteyden katsojiin, vahvistamalla jatkuvasti katsojien kuulumisen yhteisöön, viljelemällä sisäpiiritermistöä, ylläpitämällä yhteisön perinteitä, sekä kannustamalla katsojia osallistumaan yhteisön projekteihin. Visuaalisista keinoista yhteisöllisyyttä rakensi yhteyden luominen katsekontaktilla, innostuksen ilmaiseminen kasvoniilmeillä ja eleillä, sekä katsojien pääsy kameran kautta vloggaajien henkilökohtaisille elämänalueille. Tutkielma osoittaa vlog-formaatin tehokkuuden nettiyhteisöjen rakentajana. Monet löydetyistä yhteisönrakennuksen keinoista liittyivät nimenomaan vlogien kykyyn imitoida tosielämän viestintää ja yhteisönrakennusta. Lisätutkimusta kaivattaisiin kuitenkin erityisesti fanien omista kokemuksista YouTube-yhteisöistä.	
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1 INTRODUCTION

YouTube is an important new media platform for young people today. In a recent survey, 68 percent of American 19-to-24-year-olds said they used YouTube “frequently” (The Intelligence Group 2013). The popularity of the platform among young people is not restricted to the U.S.: 80 percent of Finns aged 18 to 34 watch YouTube at least once a week (DigiPeople 2013). There is no question about YouTube’s influence on young people, either. A survey commissioned by Variety magazine (Ault 2014) on U.S. teens found that the five most influential popular figures for them were all YouTube celebrities. YouTube creators can reach vast audiences, with the Swedish YouTube star Felix Kjellberg or “PewDiePie” leading the way with 36 million subscribers to his channel.

While YouTube as a phenomenon is ever-growing, relatively little research has been conducted on the platform. Computer-mediated communication or CMC, born as a discipline amid the rise of the internet in the 1990s, has flourished in the past decade, yet most studies in the field have focused solely on textual means of communication. The realm of online video, while a new phenomenon, has remained relatively neglected. This is especially the case in the realm of linguistics, where the focus has often been on written forms of text. This is a gap in research that I am interested in addressing with this study.

While YouTube often serves foremost as an entertainment platform, it has also sparked numerous fan communities. These collections of fans are often given affectionate names, such as PewDiePie’s “Bro Army” or Rhett and Link’s “Mythical Beasts”. The communities may come together to discuss recent videos, participate in group projects or live events, or partake in a number of other activities associated with more traditional communities. I am especially interested in examining this community aspect. In this study, I aim to explore what kinds of means YouTube creators can use to facilitate a geographically scattered group of people to come together as a community.

The object of this study is the YouTube channel *Vlogbrothers* (<http://www.youtube.com/vlogbrothers>). The Vlogbrothers channel is a collaborative channel between two American brothers, John and Hank Green. The channel started in 2007 when the two brothers decided to forego all forms of textual communication for a year. Instead, they set out to talk to each other in the form of video blogs or “vlogs”, as the channel name suggests. In these vlogs, they discussed matters varying from events in their everyday lives to more

serious issues, such as science and politics. They soon began to gather a following. Their fans were dubbed “Nerdfighters” in reference to the brothers’ nerdy interests.

To date, the Vlogbrothers channel has over two million subscribers. The topics of the videos vary greatly, from light-hearted joke videos and discussion on Harry Potter, all the way to hard-hitting topics such as science, education, or even economics. The Nerdfighter community is renowned throughout YouTube for their projects, such as the annual “Project for Awesome” charity event, which raises money for viewer-chosen charities. The Nerdfighter community is a particularly interesting object of study because it has so clearly succeeded where many others have failed: in creating a strong sense of community among a seemingly scattered group of people. In this study, I set out to examine how this goal has been accomplished, and what the potential implications are for other creators in online video.

This study consists of five main chapters. In the second chapter, I will highlight the two approaches used in my study: discourse analysis and sense of community theory. I will also provide an overview of the studies that have been conducted in the realm of online video and online communities. Chapter three will introduce the aim and research questions, as well as the data used in the study. It will also include a closer look at the methods used to uncover the findings. Chapter four will entail the analysis of the community-building tools found in the data. In chapter five, I will further discuss the findings of the study, and what their relevance is to studying online communities in general.

2 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I will provide an overview into the concepts that are relevant to this study. In addition to introducing these concepts, I will also discuss some studies conducted in these fields that may be relevant to my particular research questions. First, I will introduce the general framework of this study, which is discourse analysis (DA). Attention will be paid to two separate branches of DA that are both useful in analyzing online video: multimodal discourse analysis, which focuses on the multimodal features of discourse, and computer-mediated discourse analysis, which studies online behavior. Secondly, I will examine the context of the data in this study, YouTube, and introduce some recent research that has been conducted on the site. Thirdly, I will explain what “sense of community” means in relation to

my research. I will also examine some studies that relate to sense of community in online contexts.

2.1 Discourse analysis

2.1.1 Multimodal discourse analysis

Discourse analysis will be the primary lens through which I approach my study. Johnstone (2002) describes discourse analysis as a set of techniques for systematically studying every possible source of meaning in text or speech. While most discourse analysts would agree that meaning is carried in many semiotic systems besides language, the focus of linguistic discourse analysis has traditionally tended to lie in the way language in particular is used.

Multimodal discourse analysis, however, is a view that posits that all discourse is inherently multimodal (LeVine and Scollon 2004: 1). Studying all the modalities and how they interact with each other is vital. LeVine even goes so far as to argue that a monomodal concept of discourse is distorting. As the availability of video-recording methods has risen in the past few decades, studying the visual modality of discourse alongside speech has become even more important. This has never been more true than today, with YouTube's popularity having skyrocketed in the past decade. Multimodal discourse analysis becomes increasingly relevant in the analysis of video data, such as the data in this study.

Multimodal discourse analysis has been utilized to study new forms of interaction taking place online. Sindoni (2004) studied interaction in an online video chat through a multimodal perspective. Sindoni's study underlines many issues in the analysis of multimodal data. The most pronounced problem seems to be deciding how to transcribe and annotate video data. When focusing on multiple modalities, simply transcribing the textual content alone might not be enough. This is an issue that I also face with my own data; further notes on this will be made in the section on methodology.

2.1.2 Computer-mediated discourse analysis

While multimodal discourse analysis is a useful framework for studying online phenomena, the definitive approach for studying discourse on the internet is computer-mediated discourse

analysis or CMDA (Herring 2004). CMDA is broadly described as any analysis of online behavior through empirically grounded textual observations. Herring specifies that “textual” refers to written or spoken language that can be studied in textual form (Herring 2004: 33). While CMDA can be applied to multimodal data, the majority of CMDA research has tended to focus on text-based forms of online communication, such as chat logs and forum posts. This is, of course, partly the result of the relative newness of video-sharing websites such as YouTube. Even when CMDA is applied to studying video data such as YouTube videos, the multimodal aspects are often downplayed or even outright ignored (see, for example, Lindholm 2012), and the analysis is carried out on text alone.

While video data remains a relatively neglected domain in the realm of CMDA, another relevant aspect to my own study, online communities, is a popular research topic. Stommel (2009), for example, constructed a computer-mediated discourse analysis on an online support group for eating disorders. Relevant to my research, in her study, Stommel discussed the problematic nature of the concept of “online community”. She noted that not every online group can be classified as a community. This issue will be discussed in the following section.

2.2 YouTube as a platform

YouTube is a relatively new phenomenon. With the rise of its popularity, research is beginning to be conducted on the platform, but is nevertheless still difficult to come by. Studies into YouTube have focused on matters such as participatory culture on the site (Burgess and Green 2009), social networking on YouTube (Lange 2007), and YouTube as a source of information (Keelan et al. 2007).

One of the more current studies on the website was conducted by Rotman and Preece (2010). In the study, they set out to define what constitutes an online community, as well as examine whether YouTube was viewed by its users as more than a video-sharing site – even as a community. Their findings revealed that users did, indeed, see themselves as a community, often emphasizing the feeling of companionship on the site (Rotman and Preece 2010: 330). Users often identified themselves as “YouTubers”, or as members of the YouTube community.

Many studies have focused on the larger so-called “YouTube community” (e.g. Burgess and Green 2008; Rotman, Golbeck and Preece 2009). One noteworthy aspect of this is that as YouTube keeps growing, the idea of YouTube as one single community is becoming less applicable. Instead, I would argue that YouTube could currently be better seen as a network of smaller communities, usually centered on one particular YouTube channel and its fans. This is also relevant as I set out to study the Nerdfighter community, which is obviously a smaller subset of the larger YouTube realm. Of course, not all YouTube channels form into communities, and it could even be argued that a YouTube community is an exceptional phenomenon. This is a further reason why it is important to study community-building efforts on the website.

2.3 Sense of community theory

This study focuses on how a sense of community is created and upheld on a YouTube channel. Sense of community is a concept most commonly used in social psychology. The most influential theory on sense of community to date was presented by McMillan and Chavis (1986). McMillan and Chavis argued that a sense of community has four elements. The first element is membership: this is the “feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness” (McMillan and Chavis 1986: 9). The second element is influence, or a sense of being important to the group and vice versa. The third element is integration and fulfilment of needs, or the feeling that one’s needs will be met through participation in the community. The final element is shared emotional connection, which includes matters such as shared history and similar experiences.

The sense of community theory is applicable to a number of communities. Applications of the theory include measuring sense of community in a science fiction fan community (Obst et al. 2002). One of Obst’s most important findings was that fans’ relative sense of community did not differ based on whether they met face-to-face or communicated only through text. This means that a strong sense of community is possible even when geographical proximity is not present. This is a finding that seems to legitimize looking into sense of community in a community as scattered as YouTube.

Studies have also been made into the topic of whether the sense of community dimensions proposed by McMillan and Chavis are also applicable to online communities.

Blanchard and Marcus (2004) attempted to apply the theory to an online newsgroup. Findings implicated that the newsgroup indeed had a sense of community; however, the dimensions were found to differ slightly from those proposed by the theory. Most importantly, the dimension of influence could not be found in the community Blanchard and Marcus studied. This means that members did not report feelings of influencing the community or the community influencing them. Blanchard and Marcus suggested that this difference might be related to the differences between interaction online and face-to-face. In chapters four and five, I will examine whether these differences can be found in my data as well.

Most importantly, the sense of community theory has been applied to the YouTube context as well. Rotman, Golbeck and Preece (2009) set out to find out whether YouTube users felt a sense of community towards the website, and whether this was reflected in their relationships on the site. Findings revealed that a sense of community was, indeed, present among YouTube users. How this sense of community developed, and how creators can encourage it to form, has not been widely studied. This is a gap in research that needs to be further examined.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of my research is to examine how the creators of the YouTube channel Vlogbrothers create and uphold a sense of community among their viewers. The focus will be on both linguistic means, such as choice of vocabulary, as well as visual means, such as body language. The research questions can be summarized as follows:

1. What kinds of linguistic means do the Vlogbrothers use to create a sense of community?
2. What kinds of visual means do the Vlogbrothers use to create a sense of community?
3. What implications do the findings have for building successful online communities in general?

As for the first two questions, focusing on both the language features used as well as on the visual features is relevant for the analysis of a multimodal product such as a YouTube video. As has already been noted, analyzing language choices alone would hardly be sufficient for a medium as visual as YouTube. The third research question, in turn, takes the findings specific to this online video community and applies them into the wider context of online communities in general. While it is not reasonable to generalize from one online community to all of them, the Vlogbrothers' community-building efforts are likely to have implications for other online creators as well.

3.2 The data

The data selected is a total of six videos on the Vlogbrothers YouTube channel. These videos were selected by entering the search term "Nerdfight-" into the Nerdfighteria Wiki, which is a fan-created site listing the titles as well as a variety of statistics on videos of the Vlogbrothers. Videos containing the community name, Nerdfighters, in the title appear more likely to have more of a community focus, therefore making them relevant to my particular research questions. This search term returned a total of 37 videos with titles containing "Nerdfight-". This selection was then narrowed down by selecting the most recent videos, since my focus is on current community-building efforts instead of past ones.

In the end, a total of six videos were chosen, three of which were uploaded by John Green and three of which by Hank Green. The videos were uploaded between March 2013 and August 2014. The videos have an average of 366,561 views and run an average of three minutes and forty-four seconds. For language analytic purposes, the videos were transcribed based on the pre-made transcriptions on the Nerdfighteria Wiki website. In order to analyze the multimodal features, the videos were viewed several times with a focus on extra-linguistic aspects. As was previously discussed, transcription alone is not sufficient for studying multimodal data. Frequently occurring visual features were therefore also made into a series of screenshot images. This allowed for a close analysis of visual features in the videos without needing to return to re-watching each video multiple times.

3.3 Methods of analysis

In the analysis, discourse analytic methods were applied to uncover the findings. I have consulted Johnstone's (2002) introductory work on discourse analysis, as well as LeVine and Scollon's (2004) work on multimodal discourse analysis, to gather relevant resources. A close look has been taken at what is said or done and why, focusing on both the multitude of means of creating a sense of community, as well as on the possible motivations behind them. Multimodality was a special concern, as YouTube videos are inherently multimodal in nature. In analyzing modalities other than language, I have taken into special account visual modalities such as gaze and gesture.

As many discourse analysts tend to do, I took a special interest in the role of context. The context of the internet is extremely relevant in decoding what kinds of choices were made in my data and why. In studying the effects of the online context, I have consulted Herring's (2004) influential research on computer-mediated discourse analysis, as well as Jones' paper on what he calls the "problem" of context in computer-mediated communication (2002). Special effort was paid to studying how the medium of the internet can complicate community-building efforts, and yet how the medium of online video, in particular, can help bridge these gaps.

Findings were initially divided broadly into two groups: linguistic means and visual means. Under these groups, the findings were then coded into relevant subcategories. Each of the categories represents one tool for helping to create a sense of community. In discussing these categories, I have taken into account the four elements that make up a sense of community in McMillan and Chavis' (1986) influential theory, linking them with the different categories I found.

4 ANALYSIS: BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

4.1 Linguistic means

In this chapter, the linguistic means that work to build a sense of community are examined. I will discuss the various aspects of community-building found in the data and how they are evidenced through the vloggers' language use. I will also link the findings to the four

elements of sense of community: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

4.1.1 Establishing a connection

The first element of sense of community, according to McMillan and Chavis (1986: 9), is membership, or the “feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness”. At first, it would seem to be challenging to form a sense of personal relatedness to a virtual stranger speaking in a video on one’s computer screen. However, there are ways that video bloggers can overcome this strangeness and welcome viewers into their personal sphere and their community. One of these ways is for video bloggers to directly address their audience. By using the personal pronoun *you*, vloggers can mimic real-life interaction and cause the viewer to feel more connected to whoever is speaking.

The Vlogbrothers employ this tactic relatively often in the data. Uses of *you*, referring specifically to the viewers of the video, occur a total of 44 times in the data – over 7 *yous* per video on average. Addressing the viewer can occur, for example, when John or Hank asks the viewers a question, urging them to use the comment section to respond. In the video *ONE MILLION NERDFIGHTERS!*, Hank asks: “[...] please, I'm curious, what was the first Vlogbrothers video *you* watched, and when was that? I understand if *you* don't remember...”. Only a few lines later, Hank addresses the viewers again: “I was watching Vlogbrothers videos before it was cool! Also, so are *you*. *You* are right now watching Vlogbrothers videos before it's cool.” Talking to the viewers in this way creates the illusion of interaction – and, as McMillan and Chavis (1986: 13) state, the more people interact, the more likely they are to become close.

An illusion of interaction also occurs when gratitude is expressed to whoever is watching. In the video *ONE MILLION NERDFIGHTERS!*, Hank thanks the viewers of the channel: “So *thank you* to everyone who’s been a part of this over the years; whether *you* started watching when I was giving away Peeps on the street in 2007, or when I was translating dance songs in 2013, *thanks* for watching.” By being thanked, viewers are being rewarded for watching. Reward is an important part of another element of sense of community, called integration and fulfilment of needs. Participation in a community must be rewarding for its members. Although being thanked is a relatively small reward, it helps create grounds for a sense of community.

Another means that the vloggers use that helps viewers relate to them is using informal language. The target audience of the Vlogbrothers is relatively young. Most viewers of the channel are teenagers or young adults. John and Hank Green themselves, however, are in their mid-thirties. It would seem challenging at first to make teenagers relate to the older vloggers, much less wish to be part of the community led by them. However, relating to the vloggers is helped along by the fact that they frequently employ youthful terms and informal language. A few occurrences, drawn from various videos in the data, can be seen in Example 1.

- (1) Anyway, we wanna do more of *this kinda stuff*.
 That was *super cool* of you, but it also turned out to be, *like*, [...]
 It's gonna be *cool*. You should *check it out*, if you can.
 However, if he is there, I promise I will take a *selfie* with him [...]
 And that's *awesome* because [...]

A specific register is a part of the language use of many communities. While it is unclear whether the Vlogbrothers use this youthful register on purpose, it nonetheless serves to help young viewers relate and make a connection.

4.1.2 Establishing membership

The Vlogbrothers often employ rather direct means of evoking a sense of membership. As previously mentioned, fans of the channel, and therefore members of the community, are called Nerdfighters. John and Hank frequently address their viewers by using this term, often combining it with use of the personal pronoun *you*. For example, in the video *The Future of Nerdfighteria*, John urges the fans to discuss the direction where the community is going, as seen here in Example 2.

- (2) *Nerdfighters*, this is something we really wanna hear from *you* about, so there is a survey, [...] where *you* can also talk to us about... [...] So *Nerdfighters*, those are some of our thoughts on the future of Nerdfighteria, please let us know where *you'd* like it to go in the comments.

By constantly employing this term, the vloggers affirm and reaffirm their fans' membership in the community.

Community names are important facets of creating a sense of group identity. Many contemporary fan communities have a name for the fanbase. The Vlogbrothers were one of the first YouTube communities to create a name for their community, and they use the name

often. In my data, words beginning with “Nerdfight-“ occur a total of 34 times – more than five times per video on average. Members are therefore frequently reminded of their belonging to the group, which strengthens their sense of community.

Who decides who is a member and who is not? This is an important question in studying communities. McMillan and Chavis (1986: 9) point out that membership always has boundaries: there are members and non-members. They clarify that boundaries are necessary, as they provide members with the emotional safety needed for intimacy to develop inside the community. In my data, several comments regarding membership boundaries can be found. In the video *Nerdfighteria Census 2014 Results!*, Hank comments on the results of a census that the viewers responded to: “[...] 75 percent of respondents have been watching since before 2013. That’s a lot of long-time *Nerdfighters*.” This comment seems to imply that everyone who watches the videos is a Nerdfighter.

However, in the video *Thoughts for Nerdfighteria*, John comments on Hank’s previous video: “Hank, thanks for the update video, which might be even better than 12 seconds of silence at getting *non-Nerdfighters* to stop watching.” This implies that actually, not all viewers are Nerdfighters – and that membership has boundaries.

John’s comment also seems to imply that the brothers wish for their viewers to be Nerdfighters, i.e. regular, committed fans of the channel. Non-members, according to John, should stop watching. By doing this, they emphasize that it is the quality of their viewers that they value, and not the quantity. This is an important point. There are dozens of YouTube channels with many more viewers than the Vlogbrothers. Many of those channels, however, cannot be classified as communities. By valuing quality over quantity, and by guarding the community boundaries in this way, the Vlogbrothers could be making the community stronger.

Interestingly, in their use of the term, the community includes not only the fans, but also John and Hank. For example, in the video *The Future of Nerdfighteria*, John says: “[...] we wanna facilitate Nerdfighter gatherings that don’t include us”, signaling that John and Hank are part of the Nerdfighter community. This is important, because as identifying as peers and not leaders, they are refusing hierarchy and signaling that every member of the community, vlogger or viewer alike, is equally valuable.

A sense of membership is also strengthened by the frequent use of the personal pronoun *we*. The pronoun, in most cases, refers to the Nerdfighter community. In the video *The Future of Nerdfighteria*, John says: “So Hank, every year *we* have this huge Nerdfighter

gathering at VidCon, and *we* talk about what's ahead for Nerdfighteria...”. The use of *we* is an essential tool in strengthening team spirit. Another example comes at the end of the same video. John discusses the fact that, thanks to Nerdfighters’ effort, the Nerdfighter symbol will soon appear on the shorts of football players in the video game FIFA. He then rejoices: “That's right, Nerdfighters, *we* did it. *We* made it to FIFA!”. It is vital to notice here as well that John does not say “You did it, you made it to FIFA”. Instead, he is again emphasizing that John, Hank, and the fans of the channel are all Nerdfighters. This show of camaraderie is good grounds for a sense of community.

4.1.3 Using insider language

One of the attributes of membership is a common symbol system (McMillan and Chavis 1986: 10). Symbols may take different forms, such as forms of dress or, as is relevant here, language. Most communities develop their own ways of speaking, for example using a particular register. “Insider language” can also entail unique vocabulary items. Using these symbols signals group identity to other members and strengthens the sense of community.

The Vlogbrothers YouTube channel has a long history on the internet scale: the channel spans back to the beginning of 2007. During this time, events have occurred that have spurred new terms and expressions, which are still utilized in the community today. John and Hank frequently use these terms in their videos. The expectation is that regular viewers will understand the meaning even though the expressions are often obscure. For example, in the video *The Future of Nerdfighteria*, John signs off the video by exclaiming “*DFTBA!*”. *DFTBA* stands for “Don’t Forget To Be Awesome”. The expression is thought to be the unofficial Nerdfighter motto, and is known to all members of the community.

It is important to point out that not all viewers will understand this expression. Using insider language therefore also serves to differentiate members from non-members. Members of the Nerdfighter community will understand the symbol, and because they then feel “in” on a piece of knowledge that others may not, their sense of membership is strengthened.

Another example comes from the video *Nerdfighteria Census 2014 Results!*. In the beginning of the video, Hank presents his outfit to the viewers. He shows his tie, exclaiming: “Check out the tie: *TFIOS* colors tie.” *TFIOS*, pronounced phonetically, is an abbreviation of “The Fault In Our Stars”, which is the name of John’s successful novel. By *TFIOS colors*, Hank is referring to the colors of the book cover. In an earlier Vlogbrothers video, John has

decided to abbreviate the name of the book when discussing it in the future, since the name is quite long. This is another example of an occasion where non-Nerdfighters might be left confused. Nerdfighters, however, will have their knowledge of insider language rewarded. As a result, their sense of membership – and, more relevantly, sense of community – will be strengthened.

Using and understanding insider language serves several elements of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community theory. As already mentioned, it serves as a symbol system, which functions to strengthen the first element, sense of membership. Secondly, insider language can also be seen to serve the third element, or integration and fulfilment of needs: McMillan and Chavis (1986: 12) see being rewarded for participation as a part of this particular element. In learning and knowing insider language terms, members are constantly rewarded for their participation. Thirdly, insider language is also an important part of the fourth element, shared emotional connection. Many of the insider language terms that the Vlogbrothers use stem from the community's shared history. Sharing this history with other members helps create an emotional bond.

4.1.4 Honoring traditions

It has been established that insider language, based on a shared community history, helps create a shared emotional connection. There are means other than using vocabulary items, however, that can accomplish this same goal. One example is tradition. Traditions are an important part of many communities, from families all the way to large organizations.

The Vlogbrothers channel has many traditions. One of the more obvious ones stems from the origins of the channel. As stated in the introduction, the channel started as a project between the two brothers. For the first year of the channel, they stopped all forms of textual communication and talked to each other only in the form of video blogs. While the brothers now have around two million viewers in addition to each other, the tradition of addressing each other has continued. All of Hank's videos in my data begin with him saying "Good morning, John", whereas all of John's videos start with "Good morning, Hank, it's Tuesday." The videos are closed in the same manner: "John, I will see you on Tuesday" or "Hank, I will see you on Friday". The week days are their designated video-making days, John's on Tuesday and Hank's on Friday.

Traditions such as these create a sense of order and continuity. While these particular traditions are one-sided instead of participatory, they still can be seen to function as a signal of stability and continuity inside the community.

Another tradition occurs whenever the brothers refer to the video description. The description lies underneath each video and often contains important information pertaining to the video, such as links. In early videos of the channel, the brothers often forgot what the description was called and instead referred to it jokingly as the *doobly-doo*. The tradition stuck, and referrals to the description are now regularly made by saying “There is a link in the *doobly-doo*”, or some variation of this. This particular tradition occurs twice in my data.

4.1.5 Encouraging participation

The second element of sense of community, as proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986), is influence. Influence works two ways – it means that members of the community must feel that they can influence what happens in the community, but it also means that the group can influence its members. In the Nerdfighter community, nowhere is this more apparent than in the arranging of group projects. John and Hank frequently urge their viewers to participate in community projects. This means that they influence the members to participate, but the members also influence what happens in the project by participating.

Initiating activity is a challenging task. While John and Hank are usually regarded as the leaders of the Nerdfighter community, their leadership is mostly symbolic. Issuing direct commands to viewers could easily be seen as forceful and impolite. Thought has to be paid to how to initiate activity in a way that is encouraging enough to make members likely to participate, and yet is not too forceful. In my data, this is often managed by the use of *if clauses*. In the video *Kidneys, LlamaJohn, Frankenstein, Back to School, and The Nerdfighter Online Video Workshop!*, Hank makes frequent use of if clauses to engage viewers in activity. A few occurrences can be seen in the following Example 3.

- (3) *If* you're interested in making a music video for that song, we would love for you to do that.
 And, *if* you do, [...]
 So *if* you want to stretch those muscles, you can download that video, edit that video, and then share it.

In the same video, Hank also makes frequent use of the modal verb *can*. The use of this verb emphasizes that participation is voluntary: “[...] you *can* download that video”,

“[...] you *can* record those things and edit yourself recording those things”. Using a modal verb makes the requests appear more polite. It also serves to make viewers feel more in control, as they feel that the choice to participate or not is up to them.

Politeness, signaled by the use of politeness words, is another tactic that is also often used in the data to initiate participation. In the video *The Future of Nerdfighteria*, John asks viewers to comment on the video: “[...] *please* let us know where you’d like it to go in the comments”. In the video *ONE MILLION NERDFIGHTERS!*, Hank also asks for comments: “[...] a little bit of research that I want to do in the comments – *please*, I’m curious, what was the first Vlogbrothers video you watched, and when was that?”

While the issue of how to express these invitations to participate has been settled, it is still unclear how viewers can be made to feel like their participation would be rewarding. Reward, as discussed earlier, relates to the element of integration and fulfilment of needs. In order for a sense of community to form, participation has to be rewarding for members.

In my data, Hank and John motivate viewers to participate by making frequent use of emotion words, thus captivating the viewers’ emotions. In *Kidneys*, *LlamaJohn*, *Frankenstein*, *Back to School*, and *The Nerdfighter Online Video Workshop!*, Hank comments on the video workshop project:

- (4) But I *love* this world [*note: he is talking about the world of online video*], so I want other people to be invited into it and working in it and doing interesting things, especially people who *care* about it and know a lot about it – which I think includes a lot of you.

This pleading to emotion is also evident in the earlier example, where Hank says “we would *love* for you to do that”. Appealing to emotion, or pathos, is a powerful mode of persuasion, and the Vlogbrothers employ it often.

Another motivator is appealing to a sense of need and urgency. In two different videos, John states: “Nerdfighters, this is something we *really wanna hear* from you about”, and “So Nerdfighters, we *need* lots of punishment suggestions in the comments”. This tactic is considerably different from Hank’s use of modal verbs and if clauses, where the underlining message was “If you want to participate, you can”. Here, John is emphasizing that he really wants and needs the viewer to participate. It is noteworthy that in both of these instances, John also uses the community name. This seems to create the image that participating in these instances serves the good of the community. Participation therefore provides reward – and strengthens the sense of community.

4.2 Visual means

Video is multimedia: it is meaningful “through the combination of (usually) action, language, non-speech sound effects, and various visual semiotics” (Gee and Handford 2012: 83). Visual semiotics, in particular, is of interest to my study. The medium of vlogs has developed a very distinct visual style, and the Vlogbrothers, as seminal YouTube video bloggers, use this style to their advantage. In this chapter, I will pay close attention to four particular visual means of meaning-making: eye contact, gesticulation, facial expression, and setting. Each of their relevance in regards to building a sense of community will be evaluated, and conclusions made on how the visual channel of online video can help make and strengthen communities.

4.2.1 Using eye contact

Researchers studying computer-mediated communication have often pointed out that online interaction lacks visual cues, such as body language and facial expressions. To some extent, these shortcomings have been patched by the emergence of emoticons or “smileys”, which have been widely studied in CMC (see e.g. Derks et al. 2008). It could still be argued, however, that text-based interaction online lacks many of the meaning-making channels that humans use in face-to-face interaction. Missing channels, such as the inability to use eye contact, might mean that it is more difficult to create a sense of personal connection.

In the realm of online video, however, this is not an issue. Video blogs, where people film themselves talking to a camera, quickly developed to mimic various features of face-to-face interaction. Eye contact is one such feature: vloggers typically film themselves facing a camera, looking both at it and away from it in a way that closely resembles the eye contact used in real-life conversation.

The Vlogbrothers use eye contact in a typical vlogger fashion. An interesting feature to point out is that John and Hank treat the camera lens as if it were a person, alternating between looking at it and away from it. This closely resembles the way eye contact is employed in real-life interaction: one rarely looks at another person for long stretches of time. An example of how John typically uses eye contact can be seen in Image 1.



Image 1. In the span of about four seconds, John both looks at the camera and briefly pans away from it.

The use of eye contact functions in much of the same way as using the personal pronoun *you*, as discussed earlier. Mimicking real-life interaction and creating a sense of personal connection with the viewer is essential, if the goal is for the viewer to relate to the vloggers. McMillan and Chavis (1986: 13) point out that the more people interact, the more likely they are to become close. Eye contact is a vital part of real-life interaction, and simulating it in a video helps make a connection. This connection, in turn, makes viewers more likely to relate to the community.

4.2.2 Expressing excitement

It is said that the best way to engage one's audience is to appear excited about the topic oneself. The Vlogbrothers frequently use visual and verbal cues to signal high energy and excitement. This, in turn, has the effect of making viewers excited about whatever is being discussed. This air of excitement helps build a shared emotional connection, which, according to McMillan and Chavis' theory (1986), might be the most important feature of sense of community.

Perhaps the most important signaler of excitement in the data is the use of animated gestures. Both Hank and John frequently gesticulate with their arms and hands. In the video *Nerdfighteria Census 2014 Results!*, Hank discusses the findings of a questionnaire that thousands of Nerdfighters filled out. The video is filled with excited gestures, signaling Hank's excitement to both learn about the community and to share the results with other community members. Some of Hank's animated gestures from this video can be seen in Image 2.



Image 2. Hank uses a multitude of gestures to express his excitement.

Excitement is also showcased through facial expressions. Widened eyes, while most typically associated with the emotion of surprise, can also be used to signal excitement. This is a facial expression that, in my data, is mostly used by John. Examples of this expression can be found in Image 3. Both of these signals of excitement – animated gestures and widened eyes – function in much the same way. They signal that the vloggers are excited about the topics they are discussing, thus inviting viewers to share their excitement. This engages viewers and makes them more likely to connect to the community.



Image 3. A series of facial expressions with widened eyes signaling excitement.

4.2.3 Setting the environment

The significance of setting in regards to communities is not to be understated. Most real-life communities have real-life settings where their meetings take place: congregations have churches, schools have school buildings, and so on. On the internet, however, the issue of setting becomes interesting. The question of where a YouTube community comes together can have many answers. It could be argued that the video's comment section is where these communities meet: after all, it is in the comment section that most of the interaction and discussion takes place.

However, the videos also have their own setting. Vlogs are typically filmed in people's homes. In a way, vloggers are symbolically inviting viewers into the personal space in which they live. In my data, four of the six videos are filmed at the Vlogbrothers' respective homes: two videos in Hank's home office, one video in John's home office, and one video in John's bedroom.

Viewers are also invited into other locations with the brothers. In the video *Influence, Airports, and the Nerdfighter Book Club*, John sits in his office and says: "I need to go to the airport, but you should come with me". The next frame of the video is then filmed with John sitting by an airport wall. By doing this, John is including viewers in his everyday activities in the same way one would include a friend. This creates a sense of intimacy: the viewer gets to see aspects of his life that others may not.

In the video *Thoughts for Nerdfighteria*, John is visiting Amsterdam and films himself walking around the city while he talks. This functions similarly to inviting viewers to the airport: again, they are included in his everyday life and activities, creating a sense of intimacy with the video blogger. This intimacy, in turn, helps establish the sense of personal relatedness that contributes to the community feeling. It is as if John has invited the entire community of Nerdfighters along on his trip.



Image 4. An office, a bedroom, an airport, and a city street:
John quite literally takes viewers with him wherever he goes.

Image 4 demonstrates the variable settings in the videos. By bringing the camera along wherever he goes, John is symbolically also including the community of Nerdfighters in his activities. While this inclusion remains an illusion, and viewers are actually merely sitting behind their computer screens, the effect remains important.

5 CONCLUSION

In my study, I identified eight key ways that functioned to build and strengthen the sense of community among Nerdfighters. The first way was to establish a connection with the audience. This was accomplished by the vloggers directly addressing the audience, as well as by using informal, youthful language that the audience could relate to. The second way was to affirm and define membership in the community by frequently addressing the viewers as Nerdfighters, and by discussing who was a Nerdfighter and who was not. The third and fourth ways were to distinguish members from non-members by using insider language and performing traditions that only Nerdfighters could understand. The fifth way was to encourage commitment to and participation in the community. This was done by encouraging members to join in group projects.

The last three means had less to do with language and more to do with the visual side of the videos. The sixth way was for the vloggers to mimic real-life interaction by using eye contact similarly as when talking to a friend. The seventh way was to encourage interest in the

community by appearing excited. The eighth and final way was for the vloggers to symbolically invite viewers into their lives by filming themselves in intimate settings. While not all of these means are significant community-building tools on their own, when combined, they function to create a strong sense of community among the regular viewers.

The dimensions of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community theory could all be found in my data. Membership was frequently affirmed and its boundaries negotiated by John and Hank. Influence in the community was especially visible in the arranging of group projects, where John and Hank both influenced the members, and the members influenced the community by participating. Fulfilment of needs was frequently accomplished by giving members rewards for participating, such as thanking them for being part of the community. Members were also rewarded for learning the insider terms used in the community, which they then later could understand when John and Hank used them. The final dimension of the theory, shared emotional connection, was perhaps the most prominent one in my data. John and Hank frequently used language that referred to the community's shared history. By making viewers reminisce about this history, the viewers' emotional connection to the Nerdfighter community was likely strengthened.

Finding all the dimensions of the theory in my data is in contrast to Blanchard and Marcus' earlier finding (2004). In their study, they could not find the dimension of influence in their online community of interest. In the Nerdfighter community, however, the dimension of influence is highly visible. This could partly be the result of the community having two influential leaders, which is not always the case in online communities. However, it is also noteworthy that John and Hank frequently position their fans as being equals in the community. This could result in the fans feeling like they can also influence the community.

Creating a sense of community in an online setting is not always an easy task. Text-based communication – which makes up the majority of communication online – does not always facilitate deep emotional bonds to form. This is one reason for the emergence of strong communities, such as Nerdfighters, on YouTube. The format of video blogs closely resembles real-life interaction: eye contact (or at least the illusion of it) is present, informal language is used, and emotions can be conveyed in ways that only text does not allow. Vlogs also facilitate new settings for communication online. Much of online communication has traditionally been thought to occur in a separate dimension from material, real-life settings. This dimension has sometimes been called “cyberspace” (Jones 2002: 9). Vlogs, however, allow viewers to symbolically be invited to the vloggers' real-life settings, such as their homes.

The results of this study suggest that vlogs create the opportunity for whole new types of communities to form. In these communities, fans might form intimate-feeling relationships with vloggers, whom they have never even met. It appears to be the visual side of vlogs, in particular, that helps viewers connect to vloggers. This might also be why personal and lifestyle blogs have gained large audiences in recent times: posting images from one's personal life brings readers closer to the blogger's life. With video blogs, this effect is even more powerful, as it is not only still images that viewers get to see. It seems that future online creators could well be advised to take advantage of the medium of video in their community-building efforts.

This study focused on three channels of meaning-making in a video: the visual channel, the language channel (what is said), and the action channel (what is done). Due to the restrictions of a bachelor's thesis, I was not able to take into account another important feature in videos, the auditory channel. This would have been an interesting addition to studying how communities form. A question that could be posed is, for example, how much accent and sociolect affect success in community-building. This is something that future studies on YouTube communities could take into account.

The focus of this study was on community-building efforts, not on outcomes. This means that I was only able to examine what kinds of means the Vlogbrothers used that can contribute to forming a sense of community. I did not examine whether these efforts were successful; would the viewers agree, for example, that the strong sense of community among Nerdfighters was partly the result of all the insider language used in the community? While it is likely that all the means that I found in my study have contributed to the success of the community, their relative importance cannot be measured without consulting the fans. This would call for questionnaires or interviews of fans, in addition to studying video data. Analyzing the interaction that takes place in the comment section on videos is another possibility. This is something that could be addressed in a broader, more comprehensive study on a YouTube community.

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION DATA

Kidneys, LlamaJohn, Frankenstein, Back to School, and The Nerdfighter Online Video Workshop!

Good morning, John. Today's going to be a good old-fashioned boring video. So I decided to go outside! So it would be a little bit more interesting, at least.

So yeah, I'm not going to ride in a helicopter with Bill Gates, I'm not going to dump a bucket of ice water on my head, and I'm not even going to do any sock puppets. I just wanted to talk about what's going on, cause there's a lot of stuff that's going on. And I kinda want to start a couple of new projects.

The first project, John, you are not allowed to know about, but everyone else should go to llamajohn.com... Because it's John's birthday in a couple of days. And we're doing a little something, I'm not going to say what the something is we're doing, just a little something.

Number two, I wrote a song with Danny Weinkauff, the bassist from They Might Be Giants, about a kidney that lived in 4 different people. If you're interested in making a music video for that song, we would love for you to do that. And, if you do, we might be able to provide you with one of my kidneys.

Thing number three, so you know how I've been interested in making adaptations of classic novels into video blog series? We're branching off finally, not doing Jane Austen, we're going to be doing Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Our version is Frankenstein MD, starring Victoria Frankenstein, who is not quite, yet, an MD. I'm excited about this one, extra a lot, uh, because not only is there comedy, and drama, and quirkiness, but there is also science.

SciShow is about to hit two million subscribers, Crash Course just hit two million subscribers, SciShow Space is about to hit two hundred thousand subscribers. All of those things are going very well, thank you to everyone who watches them. I hope that you find them enjoyable, entertaining and educational. I do.

Okay so, here's the last thing, whatever the thing- Hi duck! What are you doing? I fake threw something and they were like, "yeah, that looks like the right motion." [singing] Who likes the little, little duckies in the pond? I do, I do, I do, a-chick-a-quack-quack.

They're getting very close now, I'm surprised by how close you're getting. This is kind of scary. There's more of you than there are of me. Aww, they're like "you definitely don't have any bread, this is really disappointing, and I'll see you later." Ok, bye ducks.

Unexpected visitors! The last thing I want to talk about is kind of weird. John and I are always looking at doing interesting things in online video. And the three things you need, the magic ingredients for making good online video, are good writing, good on camera personality-talenty stuff, and good editing. So we thought it would be cool to create a little bit of a framework, within which people could stretch their muscles in those three different places.

So people who are interested in writing, we've got a little workshop system set up over on Wattpad. I've also uploaded a video of me writing a script. It's REALLY boring!

For people who are interested in editing, I've uploaded a Vlogbrothers video that is entirely unedited. So if you want to stretch those muscles, you can download that video, edit that video, and then share it. And then other people can critique it.

Finally, for onscreen talent people, I've put a couple of scripts, linked in the description, and you can record those things and edit yourself recording those things. I hope that this will be an interesting, fun, collaborative thing for people to work with each other and critique each other and workshop their... Their stuff. Their online video stuff.

Sorry about the lens flare here. There's a rainbow! But I love this world, so I want other people to be invited into it and working in it and doing interesting things, especially people who care about it and know a lot about it - which I think includes a lot of you. But for the rest of you who don't care about internet stuff, I got something for you as well.

[background music starts] Oooaaahhhhhh! Ah, the inside of my ear exploded! AHHHHHHH!

Michael Aranda: Look, I already did the challenge!

Hank: Ah, my brain is on fire! I challenge SciShow hosts, Reid Reimers, Caitlin Hofmeister and that guy. For the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge.

John, I'll see you on Tuesday.

I forgot a thing, what a surprise! We're having a back to school sale at DFTBA.com right now. 20% off ALL posters, almost. Including this brand new one. It's a quote that I said one time. We are also for the first time ever doing pens, and notebooks, and folders. That's it, I think.

The Future of Nerdfighteria

Good morning, Hank, it's Tuesday. Henry requested today that I make a video about dragons and dinosaurs where they fight together against bad guys and there are scary parts, but not too many scary parts. And I then explained to him that sadly I can only make videos where my head moves around a screen. BUT if there are any brilliant video-editors-slash-motion-graphics-artists out there in Nerdfighteria, please take this idea and run with it.

So, since I can't make a video with dinosaurs and dragons where they fight together against bad guys, I'm going to make a video about the future of Nerdfighteria. So Hank, every year we have this huge Nerdfighter gathering at VidCon, and we talk about what's ahead for Nerdfighteria, and I thought I'd share some of the things that came out of that discussion.

One, we wanna do more IRL events. Hank, you're on tour right now and you're having a great time; we wanna do more of that. It's a bit difficult for me to travel right now because family, but a) we wanna do more Nerdfighter gatherings that we're a part of, and b) we wanna facilitate Nerdfighter gatherings that don't include us. I mean, the internet is great and everything, but nothing beats real life, I mean, except for the internet, the internet does beat real life, but real life is a close second.

Two, Hank, we wanna make educational video for younger people. I don't think I'm allowed to say anything more about that just yet, but wouldn't it be great if elementary school students had video that got them excited about like, science and history and also gently introduced them to the idea that dragons and dinosaurs did not technically co-exist?

Three, non-video educational materials to go with CrashCourse. So, Hank, CrashCourse is used in thousands of schools, which is great, and we hear from lots of teachers and students that they would love, like, essays and primary sources and worksheets and other stuff to go with the videos. Khan Academy has helped us out with that some, link in the doobly-doo, but we'd like to do much more of it in the coming year.

Four, decreasing worldsuck and increasing world awesome year-round. So, Hank, the Project for Awesome is amazing. Last December we raised more than 800,000 dollars for charity, but we'd like to do more of that stuff year-round. Speaking of which, why am I wearing a Brazil jersey? Well, because with matching donations, Brazil fans have donated more than 16,000 dollars to sarcoma research to win my World Cup affection. And overall, Hank, that project has now raised more than 80,000 dollars for the Sarcoma Foundation, I mean, I do not need any more potassium today, because that is bananas. Anyway, we wanna do more of this kinda stuff.

Five, advertising. So, Hank, we've never run pre-roll ads on Vlogbrothers because we find pre-rolls annoying; instead, we have these display ads that are like, here, and- I don't, I don't know, I'm not good with directions. But now that pre-roll ads are like, 99% of YouTube's revenue, Vlogbrothers, I'm not allowed to say actual numbers, but it could generate like, five or six times more money than it currently does. So, we're wondering a) if we should do that, and b) how?

Here are some options: keep it like it is, delete ads entirely from Vlogbrothers, start using pre-rolls and donate all the money to the Foundation to Decrease Worldsuck, start using pre-rolls and put all the money into education and Nerdfighter projects.

Like, Hank, many years ago, you bought Vi Hart a bunch of equipment so that she could make better videos more often. That was super cool of you, but it also turned out to be, like, the best \$1,000 you ever spent, because Vi Hart went on to be this phenomenally successful educational creator. So we could use the money to do way more stuff like that and plus fund other Nerdfighter projects, or we could do some combination thereof.

Nerdfighters, this is something we really wanna hear from you about, so there is a survey, link in the doobly-doo, where you can also talk to us about like, what you'd like to see from Crash Course and education content on YouTube in general.

And lastly, Hank, you know how we sponsor this amazing soccer team, AFC Wimbledon? Well, thanks to fans of the Hankgames channel, we've been able to increase our sponsorship so that next season, we're gonna be on their shorts. You heard me right, Hank, this design is going to be on the shorts of the actual AFC Wimbledon uniforms. And, Hank, this also means that when you play as AFC Wimbledon in FIFA 15, you will see this on their computer shorts. That's right, Nerdfighters, we did it. We made it to FIFA!

So, Nerdfighters, those are some of our thoughts on the future of Nerdfighteria, please let us know where you'd like it to go in comments. DFTBA! Hank, I will see you on Friday.

Nerdfighteria Census 2014 Results!

Good morning, John. This is what I'm planning on wearing to your movie premiere. I don't know, is it too much? Is it not enough? I don't know. Coming all the way from Montana, show those New York people a thing or two about how people should dress: you know, with a dead cow on them. Check out the tie: TFIOS colors tie.

John, we have officially received over 100,000 responses to the 2014 Nerdfighteria Census. Which is even more exciting because over half of the 140,000 that responded last year didn't respond this year. I don't know what those people were doing; there's 100,000 of them. Maybe they figured they'd do one census, but I should wait four years or so before I do another one, right? But, it's not because people weren't around last year because 75% of respondents have been watching since before 2013. That's a lot of long-time Nerdfighters.

Other interesting data from the survey: 100% of people say that my new album *Incongruent* is a masterful work of genius. It was the only option I gave them, but still. Actually, a lot of people didn't even know that I have a new album, so, I have a new album! In fact, there are a number of things that we do that people didn't know anything about.

14% of people don't know about the Mental Floss channel where we're constantly spewing interesting facts about the world. 30% of people don't know that we've spun off SciShow into a second SciShow channel, so there's SciShow AND SciShow Space.

33% of people don't know about our year-old YouTube sex education and information show *Sexplanations* with Dr. Lindsey Doe. 50% of people don't know about *How To Adult*, our guide to suddenly becoming an adult and OH GOD OH GOD!

64% of people don't know about our new show *Animal Wonders*, but the number one most underground, super-indie, nobody-knows-about-it thing that's part of all of our enterprises is *The Warehouse*.

The Warehouse is a show that is produced out of the DFTBA Records warehouse by Matthew Gaydos, who is the head of Customer Service at DFTBA Records. I actually watched him do a show at Sean Kelly's last night in Missoula. He is a rock star.

Somewhat difficult for me to believe is that 40% of people don't know about *Subbable*. I just feel like everybody knows about it because it's been so successful for helping us fund our shows, like, *SciShow* and *CrashCourse* and *Sexplanations* would all not exist any more if it weren't for *Subbable*.

For those 40% of people who don't know, *Subbable* is our voluntary subscription platform. You can go and subscribe to any of a number of projects, and when you subscribe you can choose an amount to pay per month. And that can be 0 dollars, it could be 5 or 10, or a million dollars a month. Nobody's done that yet. And that helps those shows exist for everybody, including people who can't pay for them.

Speaking of people who can't pay for them - in the comments of the questions about *Subbable* and DFTBA and my album, there are lots of people saying "I just don't have money, I feel really bad that I haven't bought your things, but I don't have money..." Don't feel bad. About that ever! That is the last thing I want, is for you to spend money when it will make you less financially secure. If you buy something from us and it's making you less financially secure, I am not happy. Don't do that. No.

And really astonishingly, 1) more people have read J. K. Rowling books than have read John Green books, but only very slightly. And something like 92% of you have read *The Fault in Our Stars*, which is A LOT.

So I'm assuming that all of those people will be interested in going to *The Night Before Our Stars*. It's an event that's happening all over America, not outside America, sorry not-America people. Also not in everywhere in America. Like, it's not happening here in Missoula for example.

It's the screening of the movie, the day before it comes out, on June 5th. 5:30 Eastern, 8:30 Pacific, I think. And then after the movie, there's going to be a livestream of questions and interviews and music, with John Green: my brother, the guy on the other side of this camera. Nat Wolff, Ansel Elgort, Shailene Woodley, Josh Boone: the director, other people. It's gonna be cool. You should check it out, if you can. Sorry, very sorry, to all the people who can't.

John, congratulations. Coming to your premiere! Gonna get on a plane tomorrow and come see you! Looking forward to it. I'll see you then.

Influence, Airports, and the Nerdfighter Book Club

Good morning, Hank, it's Tuesday. It's very early because I have to go to New York this morning.

So here's a funny thing that happened, Hank: *Time Magazine* named me one of the one hundred most influential people in the world, so I'm going to New York to go to this party.

Now, I am aware - how do I say this without sounding ungrateful - I am aware that this is an unearned honor. Like, I can personally name several thousand people who are more influential than I am who did not make the Time 100. There's Liberian President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the actress and activist Laverne Cox, the artist Ai Weiwei.

Also every single morning French President Francois Hollande wakes up and thinks, "You know, I think today I won't use France's nuclear arsenal to start a war that would end the human species." And that is an extremely influential decision.

But that noted, I am delighted and honored to have been included, and now I get to go to this party with other people on the Time 100, like, maybe Vladimir Putin and Kim Il Sung. Probably not Kim Il Sung. However, if he is there, I promise I will take a selfie with him and then I will make a citizen's arrest for human rights violations.

One more thing about the Time 100 before I get to the actual, like, topic of today's video, they called me a teen whisperer. Which made me think about, like, what if I were an actual teen whisperer. Like, "Hey teens, where are we gonna go to, like, take drugs and snapchat?"

But it's true, Hank, I know what the teens love to talk about, Pulitzer Prize winning non-fiction books about people living in a slum in Mumbai.

Alright, I have to go to the airport, but you should come with me.

Movie magic! So Hank, this summer in the Nerdfighter bookclub we're reading *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* by Katherine Boo, which is just a fascinating book.

But Nerdfighters, I realized that I didn't give you a due date, which is just terrible teaching on my part; I apologize; so, uh, the movie of *The Fault In Our Stars* comes out on June 6th, things are gonna be a little crazy until then, so June 10th.

You must read this book by June 10th or else nothing is going to happen to you. Also, if you're the kind of student who wants extra credit, and let's face it, Nerdfighters, you probably are, then I think it's really interesting to read *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* - we need an acronym for it, like TFIOS... BTBF. Yes, BTBF. Anyway, I think it's really interesting to read BTBF in the context of another book about Mumbai: *Maximum City*. So that's your extra credit assignment.

Okay, so no spoilers but I want to talk about a few things to kinda bear in mind while you're reading *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*.

First, I think it's really important to resist the urge to extrapolate, like this is a book about a few people living in one community; it's not a book about slums in general or India in general.

Also, luck. Hank, we like stories that make sense. I mean that's part of the reason we tell each other stories, part of the reason why we read novels and watch movies, and we're hardwired to like stories that make sense because human memory itself is narrative, so there's like a luck-eraser inside the human mind that tells you that Z happened because of X and Y. But actually, Z happened because of X and Y and lots of luck. Luck of birth and genetics and circumstance and some editor at Time Magazine liking your book!

So how does our view of the world change when we incorporate luck into it instead of assuming that human life is like essentially a meritocracy?

Okay a couple other things. The idea of private property, that's weird, how does land become owned? Also water. It's always worth paying attention to water. And lastly, when we talk about global poverty we usually talk about people who live on the equivalent of less than \$1.25 a day. That's the case for more than a billion people. But it's not the case for the people Katherine Boo writes about, who are living in Annawadi. The people living in Annawadi live above the global poverty line and they're participating and - and some would say benefiting from - global capitalism. But of course what that actually means in their lives turns out to be very complicated.

And Hank, that's the great thing about *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Everything is complicated, governments, non-profit organizations, micro finance, religious organizations, complicated, people, complicated - it's so good!

Alright my flight is boarding so I gotta go. Hank, I'll see you on Friday.

Global international poverty-

Loudspeaker announcement: May I have your attention please.

John: You can have my attention.

Speaker: Transportation security administration mandates the removal of unattended-

John: Does it REALLY?! I've never heard that before!

Thoughts for Nerdfighteria

[12 seconds of silence]

Good morning, Hank, it's Tuesday. So a YouTube employee once told me that almost all so-called "low engagement viewers" decide whether to watch a video in the first 12 seconds. And I don't want any low engagement viewers today, hence the 12 seconds of silence. Also, how long is 12 seconds of silence on YouTube? An eternity!

By the way Hank, I'm in Amsterdam. That's not a green screen or anything - it only LOOKS impossibly beautiful.

Right, but anyway, the easiest and most obvious metric for success for YouTube videos is how many views it gets and lately ours have been getting a lot of views. Like in the past month, our new videos have averaged over 600,000 views. Meanwhile, a lot of other things are also increasing the size of Nerdfighteria.

By the way, in a stunning turn of events, it is raining in Amsterdam, so I think I'm going to go inside. Rain's relationship with Amsterdam is like mine - it visited once and it was like "This is great!" and then it kept coming back.

This is better. So Nerdfighteria is growing in lots of ways. Like my books are reaching a much larger audience than I ever imagined. I mean Hank, I don't regularly get emails in like all capital letters from 80-year-old grandmothers that are like "My granddaughter told me to read your book and I did and I liked it and now my entire retirement home's book club is reading it. P.S. What happens to Anna's mom?". And that's awesome because a) we need more old people in Nerdfighteria and a) it's good to know that 80 year olds and teenagers ask the same questions.

Also, CrashCourse and SciShow and Mental Floss all have large and growing audiences and the very way that we find YouTube videos is changing. I mean having a feed instead of a subscription box means that we see more videos from channels we aren't subscribed to and fewer from the ones we are subscribed to.

So here's my fear, Hank. As communities grow - especially if they grow without deepening - they paradoxically often become less important. Like a lot of people watch the television program "Two And A Half Men" but that show's community is far less interesting and important than a much less popular show like "Supernatural". Now of course bigger doesn't always mean less important - like the Harry Potter books for instance reached a fairly large audience, but still, that core community of Potter fans, who, like, listen to wizard rock and started the Harry Potter Alliance, made big and lasting changes in the world and they're still making them.

In short Hank, if we're going to keep growing, I want to make sure that we grow like that. So Hank, we realized several years ago that fame isn't very fulfilling but what is TREMENDOUSLY fulfilling is the opportunity to make stuff you like with people you like. So I want to make that re-commitment to Nerdfighteria that this is truly a collaboration among all of us. I think we should continue to make videos that explain stuff like healthcare costs and sovereign debt and the war in Syria, and I also think we should make videos about stuff we care about like the TFIOS movie, which I care about very much. But Hank I also want to be making good and funny and nerdy stuff with Nerdfighteria so let's start today.

My last video was over 4 minutes long. Nerdfighters in Our Pants, which sounds dirty but isn't, decided that it did not meet the definition of an educational video, ergo I am punished. By the way for those of you who are new: Our Pants is the forum, our videos aren't allowed to be more than 4 minutes long unless they're educational, Hank is my brother, I like pizza, Hank likes corndogs and Nerdfighters are nerds who fight to make the world suck less. Also Hank, according to the Nerdfighters in Our Pants, we both already owe punishments so we're both punished and I'm doubly punished. So Nerdfighters, we need lots of punishment suggestions in comments.

Hank, thanks for the update video which might be even better than 12 seconds of silence at getting non-nerdfighters to stop watching. I'm very excited for Emma Approved, by the way, and I will see you on Friday.

ONE MILLION NERDFIGHTERS!

Good morning, John. This morning I got up, checked Twitter, tweeted about my halitosis, kissed my cat, brushed my teeth, got in my car, filmed some SciShow, got some P4A perks ready to ship, went back home, tumbled, made a video for Hankschannel, molested the kitty, went out to the warehouse with Katherine, folded mug boxes, because I love folding mug boxes, made a video for the DFTBA Records channel, then came home, edited an episode of Hankgames live, tumbled some more, loaned some money through Kiva, and then I made a Vlogbrothers video. I haven't actually made the Vlogbrothers video yet; that last part was a lie.

The video that I made for Hankschannel was sort of like a walk-through of all of the Vlogbrothers designs since late 2007; Internet Archives' first archive of the Vlogbrothers YouTube channel was December 1st, 2007, eleven months after we started making videos, and we had just under 10,000 subscribers. And that was a huge deal; we'd been making videos for a long time, and we were very proud of that number. It was really amazing.

And yes, this is what that looked like. Four by three! Actually... yeah, that's it. This is... this is more... [laughs]

On the day that we hit 10,000 subscribers, we also launched the first Project for Awesome. We thought that our community was so big on YouTube that it was a shame that we were not using it to do some good in the world.

People do not feel that way about 10,000 subscribers anymore. The Project for Awesome, however, was a huge success that year, and it has been a huge success every year since. This year, we raised over \$400,000, and finally, I get to tell you who's going to get that money!

I'm sorry this took so long, but it turns out that when you're giving a lot of money away, it gets complicated legally. It's dumb.

We have... The Office of Letters and Light, Not Forgotten, The Wildlife Waystation, The Alzheimer's Society, The Harry Potter Alliance, Save the Children, The BGSU Dance Marathon, Uncultured Project, Techo, and Love 146 Dayton Task Force.

Thank you to all those charities for doing such great work, and thank you to those people who made videos to support them.

Obviously for me, the big thing hanging over this video is that we got a million subscribers this week. And we also got 300 million video views on Vlogbrothers. And with help of... you, if you would like to help, we would also like to hit a third milestone this week, and that is reaching \$2 million loaned through Kiva.org's Nerdfighter group. We're very close; we're at like \$1.976 million.

If you have a current account, you may have \$25 or even more than that just sitting there, ready to loan. And if you don't have a current account, there's a link in the description; probably your first \$25 loaned will be free, donated for you to loan out.

Now, somehow, despite the fact that having a million subscribers is obviously a huge deal, and is very important to me, and it feels totally impossible, at the same time, when I think back to what our channel was, when we had 10,000 subscribers, I feel about the same about this project now as I did then.

Maybe that's because, to some extent, these videos have always been, and remain, just videos that I'm making for my big brother; maybe it's because we've always been very open about who we are and how we live our lives, while still being entertaining, so people don't get the wrong idea about us being more than we are; maybe it's just because this community is just a one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-seen-again kind of thing, and... in any case, I'm happy that that's how I feel.

So thank you to everyone who's been a part of this over the years; whether you started watching when I was giving away Peeps on the street in 2007, or when I was translating dance songs in 2013, thanks for watching.

And finally, a little bit of research that I want to do in the comments - please, I'm curious, what was the first Vlogbrothers video you watched, and when was that? I understand if you don't remember; I remember what my first Vlogbrothers videos I watched was; it was the first one, before anyone else saw it, 'cause I made it.

I was the first person to watch a Vlogbrothers video! Hipster! I was watching Vlogbrothers videos before it was cool! Also, so are you. You are right now watching Vlogbrothers videos before it's cool. Hopefully it will never be cool.

John, I will see you on Tuesday.