What Would a Teen Think of George Carlin Based on a Web 2.0 Search?

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Abstract

Teens are in a unique position today of having information delivered to them in a variety of ways including Web 2.0 platforms where the user creates the data. Data provided on Web 2.0 sites are not always trustworthy and sources can be unreliable. Untrustworthy data can make for inaccurate information and this presents a danger to students who go online in search of information. This essay explores conclusions a 15-year-old boy might come to when looking at the data Web 2.0 users provide on comedian George Carlin.
If I were 15 years old right now (2010) and someone asked me about something I did not know about, I would run and look it up on the Internet. That is how most information is gathered today: in the privacy of your home on the Internet.

When I was growing up in the 1970s, I would look up something I did not know about in my 1972-bound edition of *World Book* encyclopedias. Those days are gone. However, at the same time I wonder what kinds of information the Internet and the Web 2.0 platform are providing for today’s teens and what websites they getting their information from. I wonder how many teens know that only a small amount of information available is on the Internet. Moreover, I wonder if teens know that much of the information on the Internet isn’t necessarily trustworthy.

With the inception of Web 2.0, and so many social networking sites that count on the content users provide—it’s hard to know where to find reliable information. Lawrence Gould (2009) defines Web 2.0 as,

> Web 2.0 is all about people and tapping into what they know and want to know. It's all about people working collaboratively and sharing knowledge. It's all about making such collaborations easy and the information being shared relevant and easier to access. Web 2.0 is the entirety of technologies, products, and websites that promote two-way communication and information sharing. Web 2.0 replaces the passive surf-shop-click interaction in the "old" web with the interactivity that comes with people creating web content about all sorts of topics for all sorts of other people to surf, click, and add more content.

It is the user who adds value to Web 2.0. The more people who contribute to the platform the better it becomes. Web 2.0 is described as a way of harnessing collective intelligence which allows a greater exchange of ideas. However, a critic might argue that Web 2.0 and viewing data
What Would a Teen Think of George Carlin Based on a Web 2.0 Search?

contributed by others is not worth their time. They may very well use an excuse like George Carlin’s (1996), “Just think of how stupid the average person is, and then realize half of them are even stupider.” Gould (2009) has an idealist view of Web 2.0. Is it really about “working collaboratively and sharing knowledge”? It seems to me that most contributors on sites related to social networking *push out* critical opinions on subjects they know little about. When I first saw the poor spelling and grammar on YouTube I was aghast, not to mention how cruel and vulgar the comments were. What I found most shocking was how little users had to say. “Information sharing” as Gould (2009) calls Web 2.0 rarely happens on YouTube. Instead user comments usually appear to be something like, “HAAAAA. Way cool.” But that’s YouTube—there are other Web 2.0 sites.

Suppose one were to conduct an experiment and ask the question, “What would a 15-year-old high school student, a 10th grader, learn about George Carlin by looking at social networking websites”? I decided to invite the commentary of one 15-year-old boy. We will call him “Tyler”.

I asked Tyler to evaluate four Web 2.0 websites and tell me what he had learned about George Carlin. George Carlin is an American comedian and social commentator who recently died at 71 years of age. He delivered his comedy and commentary from the 1960s until his death in 2008. Tyler did not know who he was, which was an important factor in this experiment. He would learn about Carlin strictly by viewing Web 2.0 sites and the data left by contributors. I sat with Tyler as he viewed the sites I chose and wrote down his commentary. Here is what *he thought* he learned by looking at the following sites.
Delicious

On Delicious users bookmark their favorite sites. When Tyler and I entered George Carlin’s name in Delicious, we saw the following: George Carlin on Religion>Obituary>The Greatest Philosopher of Our Time>Education and Owners of Our Planet>Ten Commandments>Talks About Stuff>Modern Man. Based on what I saw on the website, I think a user who did not know George Carlin, would assume that he was a theologian or a philosopher. And that would be wrong.

Upon viewing the site Tyler commented, “The first thing I see is he’s a philosopher. A lot of people look up to him. He is against religion. People listen to him because he has 101 greatest quotes. I’m guessing he cares a lot about the environment.”

To break it down, arguably, George Carlin was a philosopher to many people who admired him for his blunt rationale. He was against religion, or better stated against a deity. George Carlin is not however an environmentalist. He said, “The greatest arrogance of all Save the Planet…I’m getting tired of Earth Day…and self righteous environmentalists. Environmentalists don’t care about the planet…they care about a clean place to live…they are narrow and unenlightened…besides there is nothing wrong with the planet.”

Let’s move on to Google Blog and see what Tyler thinks about George Carlin there.

Google Blogs

Part of the allure of blogging is that you want people to read what you’ve written. Consequently, a source of frustration for constant bloggers is that they may feel something similar to what George Carlin once said. “I have as much authority as the Pope, I just don't have
as many people who believe it.” I would find it frustrating to push information out on the Internet on an issue I felt strongly about and not getting the feedback I wanted. Gould (2009) describes blogging as, “…just another form of publishing. It keeps a running sequence of comments, descriptions, and other content, whether text, images, or video, available for all to see. The content is usually pithy; the postings from multiple participants fast-paced.”

On Google Blogs, Tyler and I saw the following on George Carlin: Quotes, videos, dvds, cds, books>Dead Pet Forum>Fan’s Journal>George Carlin Speaks the Truth> George Carlin on Dead People and Computers>Breakthrough Life Coaching Solutions>An Earth Tradition. Let’s put Tyler to the test and see what he thinks about George Carlin based on these posts.

“So he died. There’s something about a conspiracy and something about the new world order and maybe he believes in it. Maybe that’s why a lot of people look up to him,” said Tyler.

Well, George Carlin did say he had as much authority as the Pope.

Facebook

In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in his Harvard dorm room. Facebook has since become the industry standard for social networking and is designed to connect people. On Facebook, you acquire a list of friends, learn what they are up to and see their photographs.

“Oh, he’s an actor and director,” said Tyler while on Facebook. “But the site doesn’t talk about the movies he’s directed. He used to be a comedian. There are lots of quotes,” said Tyler as he continued to assess Carlin.

So much for Facebook, now Tyler thinks Carlin is an actor/director. Well, George Carlin did appear in a few movies and had his own television series for a while--but he was a comedian, not a self-described actor.
YouTube

YouTube tracks what videos you view, then makes recommendations based on what you previously viewed. Recently, the “Recommended for You” feature on the site, suggested that I watch *The Annual Fighting Hudson River Stripped Bass Derby 2006*. This was “Because I Watched” *Bleed Shiner*. Well, when I heard about a video featuring a fish with a name like that I just had to look it up. Consequently, YouTube thinks that I want to view more “fish videos”. Not. “Because I Watched” *George Carlin*, YouTube suggested that I view *Cheech and Chong*. Cheech and Chong were also comedians in the 1970s, but I’m not sure that George Carlin and Cheech and Chong are in the same vein of comedy….but YouTube seems to think so!

A search on YouTube for George Carlin reveals the following: Religion is Bull****>Saving the Planet>Talks About Stuff>We Like War>On Our Similaries>You Have No Rights>Airplane Safety>Football or Baseball>The Amercian Dream>People Are Boring>Doesn’t Vote>Ways to Keep People Alert>Dirty Words>God Bless America.

Based on his Facebook search of George Carlin, Tyler said, “I don’t think he’s a good comedian, maybe he’s an underground comedian? One of his videos he did got 7 million hits! It seems really popular, so maybe he is good…but he looks like he’s old. He doesn’t look like he would talk about goofy stuff. He looks like he would talk about serious stuff and make it funny.”

However in fairness to YouTube, I don’t think it’s right to go to the site and just read the headings and contributors data. You have to watch some of the videos. So Tyler and I viewed a video together. (I only clicked on videos that I thought were appropriate for Tyler’s age group. After all, Tyler had a mother to report to).
What Would a Teen Think of George Carlin Based on a Web 2.0 Search?

YouTube Video—Who Really Controls America

“It’s almost as if he wants to be a preacher, like people on the streets with Bibles. Just look at how influential he was! Look at how many people, not just people who commented, gave him 658 thumbs up! I’ve never seen so many thumbs up, even on music videos,” said Tyler, somewhat in awe.

Summation

To sum things up, Tyler said he thought George Carlin was, “a smart person, educated.” (George Carlin dropped out of school in the 5th grade.) “I don’t know how successful he is because he’s an actor/comedian. But I can see how popular he was by all the quotes,” he said.

It’s hard to write about Web 2.0 and teens and not mention the risks involved. Web 2.0 and social networking sites mean increased interactivity between people. “The more people participate, the more likely it is that they could divulge proprietary information about themselves…” says Jason Shorts (2008) who wrote about some of the risks of Web 2.0.

In a February 2010 study, Pew Research learned that 73 percent of wired American teens now use social networking sites, up from 55 percent in 2006. In the same article Michael Voelker (2010) stated that, “Social networking develops communities where people congregate, and where people congregate is where criminals are going to be…It's predators hunting at the watering hole.”

In a 2010 article by Hilary Stout, she said, “Experts wonder if technology keeps children connected or diminishes their ability to read social cues and interact the old-fashioned way.” She went on to say, “The question on researchers' minds, is whether all that texting, instant
messaging and online social networking allows children to become more connected and supportive of their friends - or whether the quality of their interactions is being diminished without the intimacy and emotional give and take of regular, extended face-to-face time.” Some researchers however believe that the impersonal nature of texting and online communication makes it easier for shy kids to connect with others.

**Conclusion**

On May 8, 2010, Betty White hosted *Saturday Night Live*, the famous late night comedy show. In her opening monolog she said,

I can’t believe I’m hosting Saturday Night Live…I really have to thank Facebook When I first heard about the campaign to get me to host SNL, I didn’t know what Facebook was and now that I do know what it is, I have to say it sounds like a huge waste of time. I would never say that people on it are losers, but that’s only because I’m polite… We didn’t have Facebook when I was growing up, we had phonebooks but you wouldn’t waste an afternoon on it. Facebook just sounds like a drag. In my day, seeing pictures of people’s vacation was considered a punishment.

In closing her opening monolog, Betty White said “Now I’m here because you wanted me here.” However, she never would have been there if it had not been for her fans on Facebook who started a campaign online to get her on the show. This in my opinion is an example of the power of Web 2.0 and social networking.
So, that’s today’s Internet. Using Web 2.0 is a great way to break down silos and a great way for teens to connect to each other when they feel disconnected. However, users must be aware that untrustworthy data lurks on Web 2.0 sites and information is not always reliable.

Delicious.com (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2010 from

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