



# 15 MINUTES OF FAME

The big news regarding the World Wide Web these days is the recent acquisition of You Tube by Google, the search engine company that has, in recent years, become synonymous with the Internet itself. And, while this action is most certainly an example of the American capitalist system once again rearing its head, it is noteworthy for a different reason. By Faisal Al-Juburi. Illustration By Fardion Abida

**T**hat a simple online video community can reach such a level of importance within ten months of its official launch that it warrants a \$1.65 billion price tag is quite jaw-dropping, to say the absolute least. And, while the Web site features thousands of clips from television shows, news programs, films, music videos, and theater performances, it ultimately strikes a chord with the majority of the population because of its tag line: "Broadcast Yourself." And, regardless of the ills that widespread exposure may cause or uncover, it appears as though most everyone is indeed searching for that promised fifteen minutes of fame, and the Internet is paving the once gravel-filled path toward that sometimes-elusive recognition.

In regard to fame, there always tends to be a morbid curiosity about the men and women who light up our television and film screens and whose songs become deeply embedded into our memories. For the most part, entertainment superstars have become the royalty of the modern age, leaving even leaders of nations – in the end – to model their public personas on such celebrities. For, it can be argued that the invention of film allowed the common lower- and middle-class man and woman to be lauded and applauded. It allowed for the ultimate dissolution of the social ladder in western society, leading people from all walks of life to believe that they now had the ability to be acknowledged on an international level, to be revered and emulated by the masses, and to feast upon attention and the finer things in life.

As many have noted numerous times, there is an undeniable fascination amongst the human race with being lionized, perhaps especially in this age of computers during which we spend the majority of our time hidden behind a computer screen. We idolize those who are the center of attention, whose mere appearance in public has the paparazzi clawing each other in an effort to get the best snapshot. Thus, the notion that fame equals worth has been deeply ingrained in our collective psyche through the actions of the majority, if not through actual words, and that is, in all probability, the reason why the chance to be preserved on celluloid is taken by most, if not all. After all, when the cameras begin to roll, one, in theory, enters into the world of the supposed elite.

The surge of reality television in the United States and United Kingdom at the end of the 20th and turn of the 21st centuries illustrates the desire for the non-actor to be a part of national television. The series' overall popularity speaks to the desire of the masses to applaud their fellow man for becoming royalty – even if only for a day. *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* allowed handfuls around the world to flex their intellectual muscles in front of their own nations. *Survivor*, an American show in which teams endure harsh circumstances in the wilderness until there is one contestant remaining, has just entered into its 13th season in six years. And, the British *Pop Idol* and its offshoot *American Idol* have captivated their respective countries and beyond through satellite technology and, yes, the Internet. People embrace those who yearn to make a career as a recording artist on an unprecedented scale, with over 60 million votes cast for the finale of *American Idol*'s fifth season.

On You Tube, the opportunity to be a part of reality entertainment is possible with just a few clicks on the video camera and computer. All those with the ambition for fame can see the

possibility of crafting their own destinies through such a Web site, hoping that there is the chance that their uploaded performances might be discovered by someone of power in the entertainment industry. A video Web site of this nature gives people the setting in which to become their own American idols, for a section is reserved for viewer comments on each video page, as well as a log of the number of viewers who have seen each posted clip. Thus, members of the cyber world become the judges of talent, crushing hopes or giving encouragement to those who post the more-than one hundred million clips accessed on You Tube daily.

In addition to the attempts of some to become the rock n' roll or Broadway superstars of tomorrow, there are the others who share videos of themselves discussing any number of issues, from the taboos of politics and religion to the mundane activities of their respective daily lives. These videos can be likened to blogs, or online journals, that have become so popular in recent years, especially amongst the United States' youth. Looking straight into the lens of the camera, people express their opinions, and, in doing so, no doubt find themselves hoping that they will one day be considered a source of interest on socially relevant topics, that each video might be the winning lottery ticket to an evening being profiled by a CNN television anchor on international news. But, above all, these videos are important because they allow their makers the opportunity to be heard, even if by only a handful of the millions who visit the site.

The way in which You Tube is sometimes used in the aforementioned ways illustrates the dual nature of some people – those who are confident enough to post their performances or thoughts in a world-wide forum and yet, at the same time, insecure to the extent that they search for some form of validation from strangers, from mere screen-names. Moreover, because of this dilemma of sorts, one is led to wonder if the majority does not highly regard a life that has been lived in relative private, if one has to be preserved on video in order to have his or her opinion be of any true significance.

You Tube and its popularity is not worthy of conversation just because of the manner in which it turned its creators into billionaires or the sometimes excruciatingly painful singing that is heard on the site. The whole is much greater than the sum of its parts, as the old adage goes. The popularity of the site and the way in which it has been used to cast a spotlight – however bright or dim that light may be – on otherwise random individuals could possibly signify a deeper need for the western civilization – and those who try to emulate it – to reevaluate its code of values and the ways in which daily life is carried out. On a certain level, You Tube serves its purpose for providing entertainment for any niche, or group. But, on another level, it italicizes the desire of many to be seen, emphasizes the priority of fame in the society in which it was created, and has thrived. And, at the end of the day, one has to ask if it is increasingly impossible to find peace of mind and happiness while keeping a low profile, if the time has come for all of us instead to broadcast ourselves. ■

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