

Theoretical Background for Understanding the Impact of YouTube on the Identity of Jewish Religious Societies in Israel

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Abstract

The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in the influence of social media platforms, and YouTube is at the center of them as a platform with great power and scope. YouTube is not only a source of entertainment – but also an educational, marketing, cultural and sometimes even political tool. Despite the high accessibility and enormous distribution of YouTube content, academic research on the direct and indirect impact of videos on perceptions of reality, emotions, consumer products and even decision-making – is only just beginning. Theoretical foundations for understanding this formation of Jewishness in the age of YouTube, the shaping of one’s personal and religious identity does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by a wide range of psychological, social, and cultural forces. To understand the influence of the YouTube platform on shaping the Jewish identity of young people in Israel, the approaches of classical thinkers in the field of psychology can be used.

Keywords: Youtube, Jewish society, Jewish studies, Jewish identity.

1. Introduction

The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in the influence of social media platforms, and YouTube is at the center of them as a platform with great power and scope.

YouTube is not only a source of entertainment – but also an educational, marketing, cultural and sometimes even political tool. Despite the high accessibility and enormous distribution of YouTube content, academic research on the direct and indirect impact of videos on perceptions of reality, emotions, consumer products and even decision-making – is only just beginning.

This is where the uniqueness of this study lies: it seeks to look deeply into the way visual content is a style that manages to shape public opinion, create changes in behavior, and influence personal and cognitive consciousness. Research is especially important among the viewing audience, which is more engaged, less critical and sometimes unfiltered exposed to manipulative or incorrect information. Understanding how YouTube videos affect users – cognitively, emotionally and socially – can provide a basis for developing educational, regulatory and personal tools to deal with these effects in a more conscious and critical way.

YouTube is the third largest search engine in the world and the second most visited website. And to understand the power of the impact, we need to go back a moment to the beginning. The first YouTube video was uploaded on April 23, 2005, and showed one of the founders standing in front of an elephant at a zoo. Simple, innocent – almost funny in today’s terms. Who would have believed that 15 years later, every single minute, a whole month’s worth of content would be uploaded to the platform (Mohsin, 2023)? Since then, YouTube has grown at a dizzying pace. In 2006, Google acquired it for \$1.65 billion – a deal that earned many backs. Today, it is a powerhouse that brings in over \$10 billion a year, with a growth rate of about 40%.

By the end of 2018, over 5.2 billion videos with a total length of one billion hours had been uploaded to YouTube. The site also had 29 trillion views, 250 billion likes/dislikes, and 33 billion comments. It has everything: religion, faith, racism, love, conspiracies, poetry, Torah lessons, historical documents, and countless interpretations of Judaism. Those who don’t swim in the content – might drown.

There are 2 billion connected users accessing YouTube every month. That’s why YouTube is the app of choice on iOS for 2018. In terms of monthly users, YouTube competes with almost every other app such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger. In fact, only Facebook surpasses YouTube in terms of monthly users, in the social networking category. Most YouTube users are men (62%). In terms of age, 49% of users are between 25 and 44. Every minute, videos are uploaded to YouTube that are worth a month of viewing (almost 10 hours every second). In 2021, this exceeded two months every minute. Also, 79% of internet users have a YouTube account.

The music category is the only one on YouTube that manages to attract hundreds of millions of repeat views on videos:

- The first video to surpass all views was a music video.
- Most of the videos that have crossed the billion marks since then also belong to the music genre.
- The song “Despacito” reached a billion views in 97 days.
- Adele’s song “Hello” did it even faster - in just 87 days.

YouTube reaches more 18- to 34-year-olds in the US than any other television network. 90% of 18- to 44-year-olds in the US use the YouTube app. In this context, even YouTube advertising is more effective than commercial TV – YouTube ads on mobile catch viewers’ attention 83% of the time (compared to TV advertising – only 45%) (Osman, 2023).

YouTube provides almost half (47%) of the world’s music streaming (compared to Spotify, Apple Music, etc.). Also, people watch a billion hours of YouTube video every day.

Between the summer of 2017 and 2018, there was a 70% increase in YouTube relaxation and calming videos (from yoga and meditation to ASMR and its varieties). 70% of Millennials watched a YouTube video to learn something new.

Since 2016, the number of small and medium-sized businesses advertising on YouTube has doubled. 62% of businesses in the US use YouTube to upload videos. 78.8% of marketers also say YouTube is the most effective video platform for advertising. This is not surprising considering that 90% of people discover new products on YouTube.

Since 2017, the number of YouTubers earning 5 figures per year has increased by 35%, and those earning 6 figures per year have increased by 40%. Most of the profits come from advertising. YouTube does a lot for heavy content producers, allowing them to profit from a wide range of options.

Where YouTube stands against other networks? Here is how YouTube stands against the world's leading networks (with at least one login per month) (Pascher, 2025):

- Facebook – about 3 billion average users
- YouTube – about 2.5 billion average users
- WhatsApp – about 2 billion average users
- Instagram – about 2 billion average users
- TikTok – about 1.5 billion average users
- WeChat (Chinese) – About 1.3 billion economic users
- Telegram – about 800 million users
- Snapchat – about 750 million users
- X (formerly Twitter) – about 600 million users
- Pinterest – about 450 million users

How many videos are posted on the YouTube app every minute? By 2025, about 500 hours of video will be uploaded to YouTube every minute. So, it would take a person almost 720 years to watch all the videos uploaded in one day.

YouTube is an American company. Its headquarters are in: San Bruno, California, United States. YouTube was founded in 2005 by three former PayPal employees. In 2006, it was acquired by Google for \$1.65 billion. Since then, YouTube has been operated as part of Google (now Alphabet Inc.).

The YouTube website interface includes 89 countries where you can browse the site (which include versions of YouTube in one or more languages depending on what is spoken there), as well as one territory, which is not recognized as an independent country. There is also a global version in English for users who choose to use it (Pascher, 2025).

2. The “dangers” within YouTube

1. Inappropriate content – Although YouTube uses filters, there are videos with offensive, violent, sexual or misleading content. Even content that seems innocent at first (such as children's videos) can be calibrated to contain disturbing content, as in the “ElsaGate” phenomenon (Maheshwari, 2017).

2. The “degradation” phenomenon (Rabbit Hole) – the algorithm recommends similar content, but over time leads the viewer to extreme content, conspiracy theories or fake news. It is particularly dangerous for teenagers looking for identity or answers to personal questions (Muldrew, 2019).

Additional dangers:

- Exposure to false or manipulative information;
- Addiction to viewing, often continuously;
- Difficulty judging between real and extreme content, especially among children and teenagers.

2.1 Screen addiction

Platforms like YouTube do not offer content – they are designed to attract and hold attention. The recommendation algorithm operates on the “one more video...” principle until the user becomes engrossed in continuous and sometimes uncontrolled viewing. The phenomenon known as binge-watching has been extensively studied (Turkle, 2011).

Excessive use of YouTube can lead to several negative consequences:

- Impaired concentration (Turkle, 2011);
- Disrupted sleep patterns (Cain & Gradisar, 2010);
- Decreased face-to-face social interactions;
- Increased levels of loneliness, depression, and anxiety, especially among young people (Twenge, 2018).

2.2 Native advertising and its impact on consumerism

Among the many videos watched on YouTube, many are native advertising – that is, advertisements that appear as content for everything. This is especially true of videos that simulate product reviews, games with toys, gadget demonstrations, or “personal diaries” of creators – but they are sponsored content (Atique et al., 2024).

For children and adolescents, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between informative and advertising content. The impact can be powerful: repeated viewing of the same products creates consumer urges, parental expectations, and impulsive purchases. This line has been discussed in communication and developmental psychology studies, which suggest that covert advertising may bypass children’s genetic defense mechanisms (Nairn & Fine, 2008).

In addition, the consumer message also prevails over the value or educational message. Identity is formed in an environment where social status is perceived through what is purchased – and not necessarily through what is understood or believed. Research also suggests that parental mediation can help reduce the effects of unwanted advertising (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005).

2.3 Offensive comments and cyberbullying

One of the key features of YouTube is leaving public comments. This feature was originally intended to encourage discourse and community – but in practice, the space has become an arena for offensive expressions, cyberbullying and sometimes even threats (Moor, Heuvelman & Verleur, 2010).

Young creators in particular – children, teenagers or influencers through them – are exposed to insulting, mocking and sometimes threatening responses. These responses erode the creator’s self-image, sense of worth and digital security. For many of them, the negative response does not disappear – but is maintained, re-observed and amplified by the platform’s disclosure mechanisms.

Research suggests that cyberbullying has similar and even more serious effects than face-to-face bullying, especially when it occurs in public spaces accessible to all (Kowalski, 2014).

2.4 *Exposure of personal data and privacy risks*

Whether consciously or not, many users – especially children and teenagers – reveal identifying information in comments, videos or collaborations with other creators. This includes data such as full names, locations, private contacts, educational institutions or personal characteristics – which can become fertile ground for harassment, identity theft or misuse of information (Zhu, Wang & Li, 2025).

The exposure does not have to be direct: sometimes it is done through small details in the video (such as a street sign, school logo, name tag), and sometimes through discourse on the platform. Children and teenagers are often unaware of the consequences of such exposure, and the algorithms – which promote popular videos – increase exposure to unexpected audiences.

Communication researchers indicate that the sensitivity to privacy among teenagers on social networks is low, especially when the content is perceived as entertaining, personal or aesthetic (Boyd, 2014). As a result, the boundaries between private and public are blurred, and the implications for personal security can be serious (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

Hence the importance of the study – precisely because a platform – precisely because a powerful platform like YouTube is freely accessible even to minors and teenagers. The power of this tool to shape consciousness, identity, and attitudes – requires critical examination, educational sensitivity, and the development of models for conscious and informed coping.

3. “The Impact of YouTube Videos on Identity”

3.1 *Identity, media, and YouTube*

A person’s personal and group identity was not created in a vacuum, but rather develops from a complex web of cultural, social, media, and religious influences. Identity – whether examined as an internal “self” or as a collective sense of self – is made up of beliefs, values, narratives, and memories. From infancy, and sometimes even earlier, a person is in constant dialogue with the culture that surrounds them – it writes the boundaries of “normal,” what is permitted, appropriate, or inspiring. To illustrate: culture creates a framework. Just like a room that is pre-designed – with colors, furniture, and pictures – culture also “shapes” a person. Music, clothing, language, and stories create a climate in which a person learns how to think and feel. For example, a teenager in Israel who adopts a style of dress, values, and slang from the Korean K-pop world is not just entertainment – it is a component of a cultural identity that crosses borders (Cote, 1996).

3.2 *The influence of society and community*

Different societies give a person clear behavioral code. A girl who grew up in a religious community, for example, from a young age has roles, frameworks, and perceptions of gender roles. Her identity, even when she moves away from the community, carries with it the value and symbolic baggage that was embedded in her. The environment – family, education system, street – acts as a constant steppingstone in the formation of self-esteem. Not always direct, but almost always present (Gutierrez et al., 2018).

3.3 *The media as a screen that shapes consciousness*

In the digital age, media is not just a source of information – it is an integral part of the process of forming identity. The influence of social societies is particularly prominent, through which the sense of the network was created, but also competition, comparison, and self-esteem.

Many young people develop this not through school or home – but through the screen. Videos, photos, comments, shares – all of these constitute experiences that pass-through emotion and lead to gratitude. The path does not only reflect reality – it also creates (Yang, 2025).

3.4 Religion as an identity anchor

For many, religion is not only a normative system, but a source of pride, meaning and a life story. A Jewish, Muslim or Christian child will often grow up with symbols, rituals and stories that are woven into their identity. At the same time, it is not a permanent identity: some will approach religion, and some will distance themselves – but the process of disengagement is also part of the construction of identity. It is not a one-time thing, but a constant tension between tradition and innovation, between loyalty and rebellion (Wimberley, 2005).

3.5 YouTube as an Identity Platform

YouTube, one of the main platforms in the Jewish community, has become a managed cultural tool through which young and old alike are exposed to content from every possible field – including identity, religion and culture. The viewer chooses, responds, shares – but not always with full awareness. YouTube’s algorithm “learns” the user and offers them additions, apart from a repetitive and sometimes surprising pattern. This creates a situation in which watching a single innocent video about Passover songs may lead, within an hour, to a series of content that reinforces a sense of entitlement or challenges it (Cakmak, Agarwal & Oni, 2024).

3.6 YouTube and Jewish Identity

The impact of YouTube content on Jewish identity is multi-layered. On the one hand, there is much content that deepens the connection to tradition – from Torah lessons and Hasidic music to videos about holiday customs or the life of a Jewish community in the Diaspora. These videos can evoke a sense of connection, nostalgia or even religious inspiration. On the other hand, there is global, satirical, critical or non-Jewish content that challenges the clear boundaries of ordinary identities. That undermines. Whether in browsing that is clear, this gap creates a fascinating tension – content that strengthens identity versus content that awakens the teenager. Conscious choice of content versus random browsing that leads to a sense of alienation. The question is not just what we see – but how viewing changes us: Do I feel more “Jewish” after watching a certain video, or is my identity slowly eroding, without me noticing? (Creese, 2019; Galily, 2019).

3.7 Directions for the current study

Against this background, the study seeks to examine how to influence and see YouTube videos – with an emphasis on religious content – on the processes of forming Jewish identity among Jewish viewers. The study examines questions such as: What is the role of the algorithm? What are the emotional and cognitive patterns that arise in the wake of tea? And how do viewers perceive the connection between what they see and what they feel they are? (Missier, 2025).

4. Religious and cultural identity formation in the digital age

The Process of Identity Construction Influenced by Repeated Exposure to Digital Media (Saputra, 2022).

4.1 *Psychological theories for understanding the process of identity formation*

4.1.1 *Sigmund Freud: Internal conflict and identity*

Freud viewed identity as the product of a conflict between three mental systems: the id (unconscious drives), the ego (mediating self), and the superego (conscience and internalized values). Watching YouTube content creates opportunities for exposure to stimuli that appeals to both drives (such as emotional or entertainment content) and morality and values (such as religious or educational content). The process of watching YouTube constitutes an arena for an internal struggle between the id and the superego, with the ego mediating between them and structuring the viewer's identity according to the content consumed and the internal response to it (Freud, 1923).

4.1.2 *Alfred Adler: Belonging, community, and identity*

Adler argued that humans strive for belonging and status in a community, and that identity is built from an attempt to achieve recognition and a sense of self-worth. Unlike Freud, Adler emphasized the social aspect of the soul. YouTube serves as a platform that enables a sense of belonging through content communities – Judaism channels, lectures on Zionism, and series on Jewish history – that strengthen the viewer's connection to their identity. This process strengthens Jewish identity out of a psychological need for belonging and a sense of contribution to the group (Adler, 1937).

4.1.3 *Viktor Frankl: Meaning, identity, and community.*

Frankl saw meaning as the central force that drives the human soul. Humans seek purpose, mission, and content for their lives – especially after crises or feelings of emptiness. YouTube content that deals with tradition, collective memory, Jewish identity, and national destiny may be a source of meaning for the viewer. Such exposure can strengthen identity through a sense of mission and understanding of one's place within the overall Jewish story (Frankl, 1985).

4.2 *YouTube as a platform for shaping identity*

YouTube serves not only as a technological platform, but also as a powerful socializing agent. Its algorithms replicate content that the viewer responds to, thereby reinforcing viewing patterns and identity. The viewer may be repeatedly exposed to the same content – whether religious, national, or universal – and this repetition affects the process of identity formation. The platform allows for the construction of self-conscious identity alongside an unconscious identity, guided by deep psychological mechanisms (Rosana, 2024).

5. Conclusion

Theoretical foundations for understanding this formation Jewishness in the age of YouTube the shaping of one's personal and religious identity does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by a wide range of psychological, social, and cultural forces.

To understand the influence of the YouTube platform on shaping the Jewish identity of young people in Israel, the approaches of classical thinkers in the field of psychology can be used.

Sigmund Freud – The conflict between drive and social order

According to Freud, a person's identity is built from an internal struggle between three parts within them – the id (the desires and impulses), the ego (the balance between what I want and what is possible in reality), and the superego (the conscience and the values I learned from home, from society and from religion). Within YouTube, exposure to different content can often flood this struggle within a person.

For example, a person who sees a video that talks about absolute freedom versus a video that mentions his religious values – and this arouses questions, hesitations and sometimes a sense of guilt. This struggle affects how the person defines himself as a Jew, and how he chooses to behave in front of the world.

For example:

Impulse vs. Value: A religious guy is surfing YouTube and sees a video about parties and trips abroad, and he feels drawn to it – but immediately an inner voice comes up saying: “Wait, does this even fit with my values? Is this what I want for myself?”

Or repression through viewing: Someone who has gone through a crisis of faith does not talk about it with friends or family but finds channels on YouTube of secular speakers or critics of religion and watches them for hours – as a way to express or escape the thoughts that bother them.

Or imitation or replacement: A girl who wants to feel part of the religious community, but lives in a secular environment, finds rabbis, lectures, songs and prayers on YouTube – and this becomes a substitute or reinforcement of her religious identity, even without a community around her.

YouTube is used as a space for “externalizing the unconscious” by searching for content, responses and counter-reactions to parental or religious authority. The viewer may build an identity through resistance or imitation of authority figures or mini figures on YouTube.

Alfred Adler – The desire for belonging and self-worth

Adler believed that people are driven by the need to feel like they belong and are relevant – they want to know that they are important to others and that they have a place in society. This is very evident on YouTube: there you can find communities Digital around almost every topic, including Jewish identity.

Through the videos, comments, and discussions, people feel part of something bigger than themselves, and this helps them build their identity – whether as Jews or as people searching for general meaning in life.

For example:

Connection through music: A Jewish girl in the Diaspora who watches performances by Jewish singers on YouTube and sings with them – even if she is alone in the room, she feels part of something common and close.

Or discussion in comments: An Israeli guy responds to informative videos about Judaism or Israel, argues with others in the comments, and feels like he is defending his identity – even without meeting any of them in real life.

Or belonging in groups: An ultra-Orthodox woman who connects to the YouTube channel of a spiritual teacher or rabbi, and watches regular classes, feels like she belongs to a broad group of religious women, even if she has no one around her to share this with.

Viktor Frankl – Life Meaning as a Driving Force

Victor Frankl believed that the most powerful force that drives us is the search for meaning in life. When we are exposed to content on YouTube, it can provoke thoughts and questions in us about what is truly important to us. Many times, it is precisely through these videos that people begin to understand how significant their Jewish identity is to them — and this pushes them to want to fill their lives with valuable content and real connection.

For example:

An inspiring video: A secular guy who happens to watch a video on YouTube about a Holocaust survivor who talks about the power of faith and hope — this video makes him rethink his roots and identity.

Or a rabbi's lecture: A young woman who finds a rabbi's lecture on YouTube about the meaning of life and values in Judaism, and feels that it touches her personally, and it even pushes her to start reading books about Judaism.

Or a video from a charity organization: A man watches a video about a Jewish group's charity work, is moved by it, and decides to volunteer himself — not just to help, but because it gives him a sense of mission and fulfillment.

Carl Jung – Symbols and Archetypes

Carl Jung spoke about how shared symbols — like a flag, a prayer, or a familiar story — touch our hearts far beyond words. When we see Jewish symbols repeated on YouTube, it's not just decoration; it evokes deep emotion in us and reinforces the feeling that we belong to something bigger than ourselves, to a community and tradition.

For example:

Lighting Hanukkah candles: A girl who watches a YouTube video of lighting candles at the Western Wall suddenly feels excited and connected to the essence of the holiday, even if she lives abroad far from Israel.

Or singing “Hatikva”: A young man who hears “Hatikva” on YouTube in front of tens of thousands of people in the stands at a Jewish sporting event is filled with pride and excitement — and feels part of a people.

Or the Star of David: A little boy sees a video with a story about the meaning of the Star of David, and despite his young age, he begins to ask questions about this symbol and feels proud to wear a necklace with a Star of David.

Existential Approaches – Irvin Yalom and Rollo May

The existential approach deals with our basic need to find meaning in life, to feel that we belong and that our lives matter, and also to deal with the big and difficult questions that arise in every person — such as “Who am I?”, “What do I believe in?” and “What gives my life value?” According to this approach, many of our troubles (such as anxiety, depression, or confusion) do not stem solely from biological or social problems, but from our difficulty in dealing with deep existential questions—the knowledge that life is limited, that we are responsible for our choices, and that meaning is not given to us “from outside,” but that we must create it ourselves.

Important researchers in this approach are Irvin Yalom and Rollo May, who emphasized how important it is to help a person search for meaning, deal with deep fears, and live an authentic life, that is, a life that is consistent with their true values.

Therefore, when we are exposed to content on YouTube, it is not just entertainment—sometimes the videos touch on deep topics, which really provoke us to rethink ourselves, our faith,

and our place in the world. On YouTube, especially in Jewish or spiritual content, people find both support and encouragement as well as a place that generates questions.

For example:

A teenager watching a rabbi talk about crises and meaning Life:

He suddenly realizes that he is not alone in feelings of confusion or lack of purpose and begins to think seriously about the meaning he wants to give to his life – for example, through connecting to tradition or social action.

Or a woman in the Diaspora who watches a video about Jewish holidays and their connection to personal meaning:

She is excited to discover new perspectives on holidays that she knew only as external rituals, and this arouses in her a desire to learn and deepen her Jewish roots and identity.

Or a young man who watches a vlog of someone who is struggling with doubts about his faith:

He recognizes similar questions in himself and understands that this is legitimate and does not mean that he has “lost his way” – on the contrary, it can be part of a mature and healthy process of building an identity.

Erik Erikson – Theory of the stages of development

According to Erikson, adolescence is a critical stage in which a person builds an identity for himself. This is the time when questions arise such as: Who am I? Where do I belong? What do I believe? YouTube, in this respect, has become a significant arena at this age: it is not only a source of entertainment, but also a place where teenagers choose what to watch, who to be interested in, and how they want to present themselves to the world.

For example:

A religious boy who watches rabbinical questions and answer videos on YouTube strengthens his sense of religious identity.

Or a girl who is interested in social activism is exposed to videos about social justice and feels part of a global community.

Or an adolescent who gets confused between secular and traditional content on YouTube may feel an internal conflict and ask himself which world he belongs to.

Albert Bandura – Social learning theory

Bandura argued that we learn not only from books or from teachers, but mainly from observing and imitating others – especially those we perceive as successful, smart, or significant. There are countless such figures on YouTube: from rabbis to religious musicians, to people who influence the world, whether they are religious or secular.

For example:

A boy imitates an ultra-Orthodox YouTuber who talks about keeping the Sabbath, and he too begins to grow stronger.

Or a girl is attracted to secular content creators, adopts their style of speech and dress, and begins to distance herself from her traditional upbringing.

Or a teenager who listens to an international Jewish singer feels connected to Jewish identity through music, even without a religious framework.

The Israeli and Diaspora context of Jewish identity formation through YouTube Jewish identity, like other religious and ethnic identities, is shaped by a deep historical dynamic integration between the social, cultural and technological realities of the period (Cohen, & Veinstein, 2011).

In the decades since – and especially in the digital age – there has been a growing understanding that exposure to online content, especially on open and multi-layered platforms like YouTube, can significantly influence this formation activity of Jews, both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

The YouTube platform, which is a central source for consuming information, culture, learning and entertainment, appeals to diverse audiences around the world, and offers information and content – including content with a religious, cultural and national dimension.

Included in this abundance are Torah lessons, lectures on Jewish history, Jewish music performances, content by religious or Haredi content creators, channels that deal with Israel and are translated for Jewish audiences in the Diaspora, and more.

The Israeli context among young Jews in Israel – especially among people connected to formal religious frameworks – YouTube may constitute an almost exclusive source of exposure to those with an affinity for Jewish identity.

The platform gives the viewer the freedom to choose the nature and level of connection to the content: both out of authentic and ongoing interest, and sometimes as if from the intention of the algorithm, which offers content with a Jewish background even to those who did not explicitly seek it.

This situation raises a fundamental question: Can the media fulfill an educational and identity role similar to (or alternative to) that of the formal education system?

The current study aims to examine this issue while addressing cultural, social, and technological contexts – in Israel among religious and secular Jews.

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