



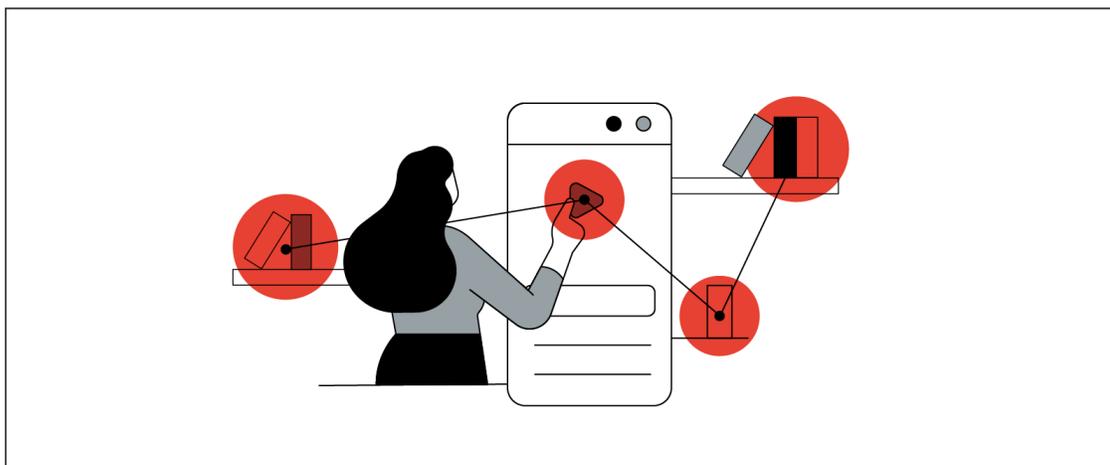
Subscribe



UNITED STATES

# New video research shows what viewers value during the pandemic, and beyond

Vanessa Hensler, Kim Gardner / September 2020



In this unprecedented global moment, people are turning to digital video for more reasons than ever. Need an [at-home workout](#)? An [up-close-and-personal concert](#)? A [home-school sidekick](#)? Digital video has you covered.

For years, the variety and accessibility of digital video have pulled audiences away from traditional TV and toward streaming platforms. And while the [rise of streaming](#) was always expected, it [seems to be accelerating](#).

As people who are deeply interested in understanding why and how people turn to online video, we've long been curious about the shift to streaming. In fact, late last year, we set out to take a closer look at how people use online video and to study the emotional associations they have with different video platforms, including streaming platforms like Hulu, social media platforms like Facebook, and linear TV. In partnership with media agency OMG, we surveyed 2,000 people in the U.S., conducted 75 weeklong digital ethnographies, and hosted 15 in-home sessions where we observed people's behaviors throughout the day.

Then the pandemic hit. And given its life-altering nature — and inevitable impact on people's video watch behavior — we extended our research. Throughout May, we interviewed an additional 2,000 people.

Our monthslong process and analysis shed light on the meaningful ways video is playing a role in people's lives. These are the three distinct themes that emerged.

## **In times of uncertainty, digital video can be a wellspring of positivity**

This year has been challenging on so many fronts. A large majority of viewers have reported feeling anxious,<sup>1</sup> which is no surprise. They also said that they've found joy and relief through video: 79% said streaming platforms make them happy.<sup>2</sup> As one interviewee told us, "If I'm having a bad day, I'll just put on a YouTube video, and then I'm dying laughing, and it makes me feel so much better."



79%

of respondents said streaming platforms make them feel happy.

Think with Google

Source: Google/Talk Shoppe, U.S., whyVideo post COVID-19 study, n=2003 A18-64 general population video users, May 2020.

Video's role as a positive antidote has taken many forms in recent months. Nostalgic viewers head to HBO Max to hang out with "Friends," while aspiring bakers indulge in the soothing tenor of Netflix's "The Great British Bake Off."

Over on YouTube, channels like [Some Good News](#) or videos like "[Dear Class of 2020](#)" inspire and cheer people up. As one respondent explained, "There are reviews, music videos, you can learn things, and you can get inspired. If you're going through something — how to get over depression — other people will relate to you. It's everything."

## Digital video can fill gaps in understanding and education

While video has been a powerful educational tool for years, 2020 has been a [unique time for learning online](#). At this point, who among us hasn't relied on a [home-school-friendly science project](#), [DIY haircut](#), or a [cooking tutorial](#)? As one respondent explained, "How-to videos give me energy. The wide variety of choices YouTube offers makes it kind of my sidekick. I don't go too far without it."

Right now, in a time when 65% of people say they're taking a moment to reevaluate their lives and their goals,<sup>3</sup> online video is a particularly

useful resource. More than half our respondents – 58% – reported that they are using digital video to learn new skills.<sup>4</sup>

**In one respondent’s words,  
“Video can show all different  
sides of an issue, rather than  
just one.”**

The scope of what people are interested in learning about is vast. They are turning to video to understand everything from [how germs spread](#) to the history of [racial injustice](#). Since the medium is visual with the ability to be immersive, stories can be told with the context, nuance, and care they deserve.

In “[The Origin of Race in the USA](#),” for example, the creator visualized primary sources to share in-depth analysis that many Americans may have never gotten in a traditional classroom. The New York Times’ short film, “[A Conversation About Growing Up Black](#),” allowed viewers to hear young Black people’s experience directly, in a way that’s more compelling and emotive than reading words on a page. In one respondent’s words, “Video can show all different sides of an issue, rather than just one.”

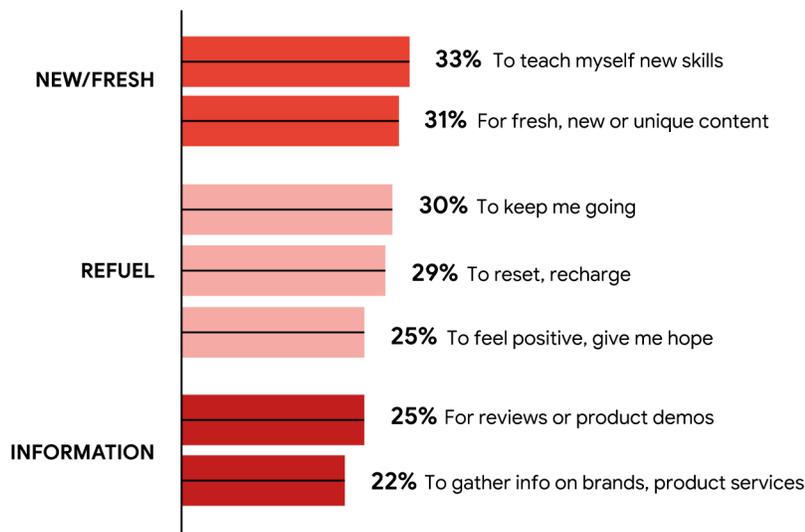
## **Fresh content helps us feel engaged in a constantly changing world**

We know that Americans are [watching more video than ever since the onset of the pandemic](#). Eighty-five percent of viewers say they’re watching more YouTube specifically (compared to 30% for other

video platforms), and the No. 2 reason cited for increased video usage overall was “fresh, new, or unique content.”<sup>5</sup>

When our global and individual realities seem to change constantly, people want video that reflects what’s going on in the world today, right now. Our internal data in March showed that over 60% of signed-in viewers of YouTube on TV screens watched a video published in the last seven days.<sup>6</sup>

### Top drivers of increased video usage across all streaming services



Think with Google

Source: Google/Talk Shoppe, U.S., whyVideo post COVID-19 study, n=2003 A18-64 general population video users, May 2020.

Our research made it clear that in a “new normal” marked by indefinite uncertainty, online video is a powerful medium for positivity, exploring new ideas and difficult issues, and simply engaging with things that feel timely. A platform like YouTube, which offers a diversity of creators and a wide array of content, allows for

constant innovation and adaptation to viewers' needs – whatever they are today and whatever they may be tomorrow.

---

Vanessa Hensler

Lead Effectiveness Researcher for Ads Marketing, YouTube



Kim Gardner

Contributor, Video Marketing at Google



---

### Sources (6)

<sup>1,3</sup> Talk Shoppe, U.S., COVID-19 Perceptions and Impact Tracker, U.S. general population 18+, April 2020–May 2020.

<sup>2,4</sup> Google/Talk Shoppe, U.S., whyVideo post COVID-19 study, n=2003 A18-64 general population video users, May 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Google/Talk Shoppe, U.S., whyVideo post COVID-19 study, n=2003 A18-64 general population video users, other platforms include cable/satellite TV, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, Twitch, Disney+, Hulu, HBO GO, Sling TV, Showtime Now, Quibi, May 2020.

<sup>6</sup> YouTube Internal Data, Global, March 11, 2020–April 10, 2020.

---

## Recommended for you

Article

Article



What pandemic video trends reveal about consumer needs

More people are streaming YouTube on their TV screens. Here's what

---

Get the latest data, insights, and inspiration from Google.

[Subscribe](#)

[About Google](#) [Products](#) [Advertising](#) [Business](#) [Privacy & Terms](#) [About Think with Google](#)

[United States](#)