

## The New York Times leans into YouTube's audience engagement features to drive growth

The New York Times is a leading news organization in the United States and throughout the world. Founded in 1851, The Times has worldwide influence and readership, and has won 130 Pulitzer Prizes, more than any other outlet.

### OPPORTUNITY

The New York Times wanted to expand and increase audience engagement on YouTube with its "Visual Investigations" series, which it has been producing for several years on [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). The team used several platform features to deepen their relationship with the series' existing audience and help new viewers understand the value of this visual journalism. The Times hopes the long-term impact of the project will be to bring the YouTube audience to nytimes.com as the YouTube audience has a different demographic makeup than that of its site.

### APPROACH

"Visual Investigations" is a series of investigative reports, which analyzes audiovisual evidence to hold the powerful to account, deconstruct major news events, and spotlight important stories around the world. To deepen engagement and expand its audience, The New York Times focused on increasing interaction with viewers in an authentic way by using YouTube features like Community posts and reporter comments.

**Deepening engagement with existing audiences:** As a first step, The New York Times helped its reporters better interact with audiences by pinning reporter comments to the top of video comment sections. It did this by giving reporters a simple formula of how to engage: Reporter introduction + behind-the-scenes insights + answering questions. It made reporter comments a required part of its publishing playbook — in fact, The New York Times is one of the first major news organizations globally to encourage reporters to consistently engage in the YouTube comments section.

**Attracting new audiences:** In order to drive viewers and channel subscriptions, the team designed a new end-screen template and started to add verbal calls to action to some of their videos. They wrote scripts that were genuine and matched the tone of the initial investigation. This helped increase the subscriber rate on these videos.

**Going live:** The capstone project for the initiative was a live discussion with the entire "Visual Investigations" team. This took fans of the series behind the scenes and showed them how the team executes these investigations. The Times gathered questions ahead of time and designed a studio to provide a professional feel. During the live session, the team outlined reporting strategies and tips, and responded to audience questions that came in via live chat.

### RESULTS

The Times successfully increased audience engagement with its "Visual Investigations" series and helped drive the broader awareness of its YouTube channel.

- **Doubled subscriber rate** on videos with verbal calls to action.
- **4M+ views** on a [video](#) showing how Kim Jong-un gets his \$500K Mercedes.

### LEARNINGS

**Viewers want transparency:** Viewers appreciate having access to your reporters (via comments, live streams, etc.), as well as insight into your reporting process. The Times found that audiences were extremely responsive and appreciative when engaging with reporters in the comments section of its channel. And while the audience responded positively to the behind-the-scenes live stream, some viewers expressed a desire for more live interaction rather than reporters primarily focusing on pre-scripted questions.

**Success means getting buy-in from your entire team:** You can do that by showing them the impact of engaging with an audience.

**Share your big successes with your audience:** Every time one of your investigations leads to tangible impact (e.g., Germany's Ambassador to the United Nations held up The Times' reporting during a Security Council meeting as evidence of Russian strikes on hospitals), share that update with your audience via a Community post.

“ We're aiming to make visual journalism sustainable in our own community on YouTube but also set a precedent for how video reporting can be investigative, can be definitive, and can be award-winning.

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