

Social Media Video Format Report

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to explore the possibility that we can maximise Supply Nation's exposure on social media platforms by

- capitalising on screen real-estate in scrolling feeds
- adding captions to extend marketing reach to those people who will
- test whether there are differences between direct uploading to social media platforms and simply supplying a link.

Assumptions

- Platforms included in this study are as follows; Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, Linked in.
- 'Stories' (Instagram, Facebook) and IGTV don't really form part of our content pipeline. People can use them, of course, but Supply Nation doesn't post 'official' videos to those channels.
- The test formats used in this test were standard 16:9 widescreen, square, and vertical format (9:16).

In the following comparisons, they will always be represented in that order: Widescreen, Square, then Vertical Format. Since we do not yet have any vertical format content, I made one using the centre section of a standard widescreen video with a blurred and enlarged background to fill up the space above and below the frame.

- In the interests of user choice, *closed* captions are preferred where possible, as *open* captions do not offer the ability for the user to turn them off.
- That the user experience on mobile is the same on all devices. I used a Galaxy S8+.

Platforms

Youtube

Previews

By Default, Youtube is a widescreen format. You can upload videos in other formats but the preview will display with black bars as follows:

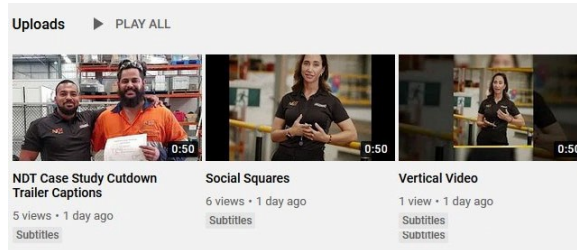


Figure 1 Youtube Previews for Vertical, Square and 16:9 formats

Playback

However, when the video is watched, the black bars are replaced with white ones that blend into the interface.



Figure 2 Youtube Videos as they appear on a computer

On mobile, it all depends on how you hold your phone. Clicking through to a video in Portrait mode will play the video in a preview window as seen below.

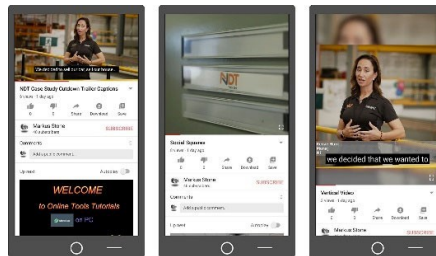


Figure 3 Youtube mobile vertical format Preview Windows

Users can still click to go fullscreen in Portrait mode, in which case they see this.

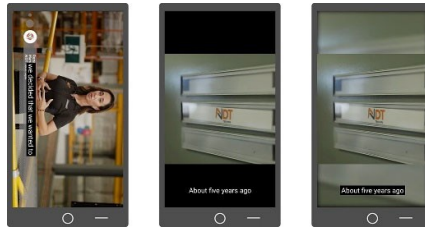


Figure 4 Fullscreen Youtube formats when Phone Held Vertically (Note: Youtube flips 16:9 videos in fullscreen mode)

When held horizontally, the app opens directly to fullscreen mode without going via the preview window.



Figure 5 Fullscreen Youtube formats on Mobile

Captions

Youtube has an automatic caption AI that is surprisingly good, although there is a lag time between when the video is uploaded and the captions actually become available. If captions must go live at the same time as the video, there are two options: either upload the video earlier but set it to private so the AI has time to work, or create a captions file manually in Premiere and upload that directly.

To enable subtitles when uploading a video, simply scroll down, then click on 'more options'.

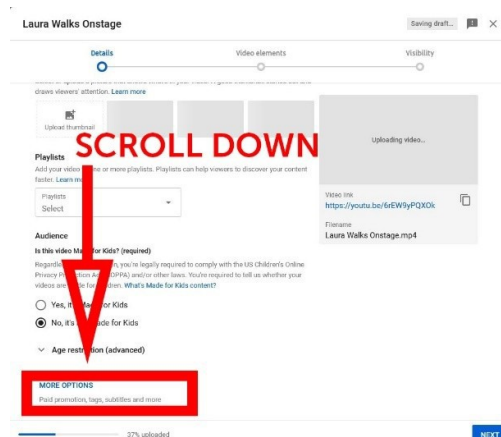


Figure 6 Where to find the Captions options in Youtube

This can also be done after the fact, which means we could add auto captions to all our existing content simply by engaging this option.

This opens the subtitle options. Select English as your language and select 'this content has never aired on television in the US' from the dropdown on the right.

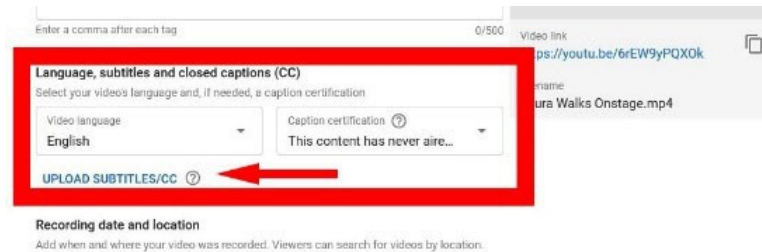


Figure 7 Youtube's caption settings

Once you save and close, the AI engine will analyse the video and create captions. However, if you want to add your own subtitles, you can make them in premiere and upload them here at any time. To do that, select the 'upload subtitles' option and choose 'with timing'.

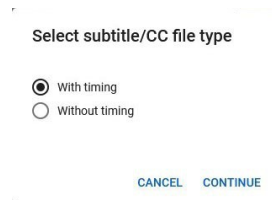


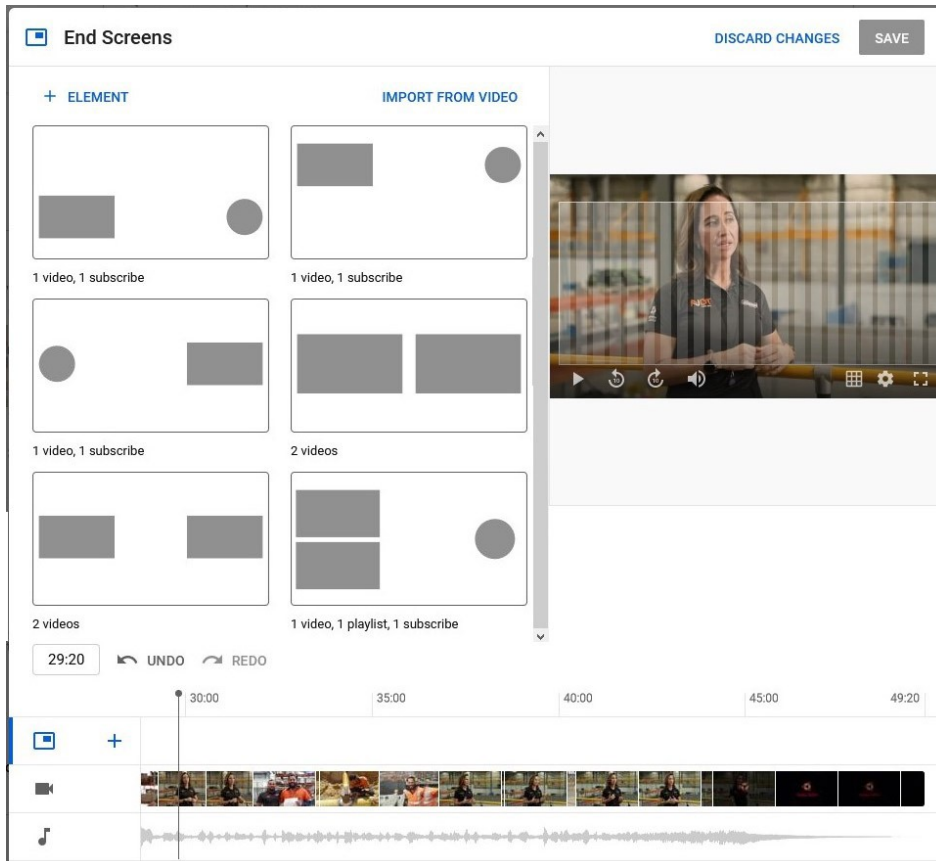
Figure 8 Youtube's Subtitle Selection Window

For reference, Youtube likes CEA-608 CC1 standard, exported as a sidecar *.srt file.

Youtube also offers the ability to download their captions so if time permits, it should be possible to let the Youtube AI transcribe the captions and just download and fix any mistakes (as long as the lag time is not critical).

Youtube End screens

Facebook end screen options come up for videos that have been uploaded. Here you can control options for what users see once they reach the end of the video they are currently watching.



The options allow various configurations with which users can promote other videos, the channel subscription link, and playlists. This allows for cross promotion to retain viewers by directing them to more of our own content.

Youtube Cards

Cards are very similar and allow you to place link buttons within the video at any time. The links can be to another video, playlist, channel or (importantly) link. Utilising this would enable us to add functionality to say, promote awards entries and provide a link in the video itself that users can click on to be redirected to the awards submissions page.

Instagram

Feed

Instagram is different in that it is almost exclusively a mobile format, which means that video content can only be uploaded from a smartphone. In a feed, the different formats appear as below.

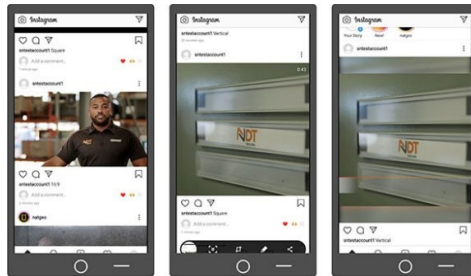


Figure 9 Instagram's feed with 16:9, Square and Vertical content. Note how much more the square and vertical posts dominate the feed, although the vertical format is cropped top and bottom

Instagram plays videos directly in the feed. There is no fullscreen option (save for IGTV), and it does not have a landscape mode, so the images above represent the sum-total of possibilities for viewing our content on Instagram. Note that vertical format has been slightly cropped top and bottom.

IGTV is a vertical format only (not pictured)

Captions

There is currently no ability to add closed captions to Instagram videos. If used, captions must be 'burned in' to the video with no option to turn them off.

Facebook

Feed

There are two ways of getting videos to appear in Facebook; By direct upload, or by sharing a link. They appear differently depending on the upload method. You will notice that the videos that have been linked to capture much less screen real-estate than videos that have been directly uploaded to Facebook. Clicking on a linked video will take you to that link, ie, it will open a Youtube tab or app.

Facebook does operate (poorly) in landscape mode, but the quality of user experience is not worth considering.

Captions

Linked videos obviously have whatever capabilities the external video provider offers.

Direct uploads have no caption support. Burned in closed captions would be the only option if required.

Addendum 31/08/2020

Facebook

Facebook have recently changed their interface. Videos uploaded as links on Youtube no longer appear as small squares, instead they appear in the feed as much larger images (see below). Also, when using direct uploads vertical videos now have black bars on the sides.

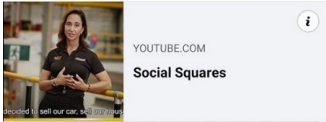
16:9 link
Also to stories



Like Comment Share

Markus StoneTest
1d · 🌐

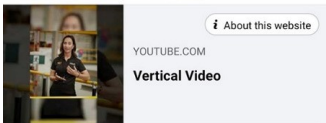
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGNNnje0iyU>



Like Comment Share

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Just now · 🌐

https://youtu.be/NG7HhEmp7_o



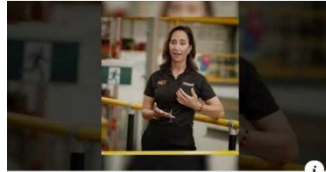
Like Comment Share



YOUTUBE.COM
NDT Case Study Cutdown Trailer Captions



YOUTUBE.COM
Social Squares



YOUTUBE.COM
Vertical Video

Direct upload Embedded 16:9



Square Direct



Vertical Direct upload to stories

Direct upload 16:9



Square Direct



Vertical Direct upload to stories



LinkedIn

Feed

Is very similar to the Facebook Interface. Linked videos redirect users to the relevant site. Videos that have been uploaded directly using the LinkedIn interface appear larger in the feed. More real estate is given to videos that have been uploaded in the interface, rather than linked to.

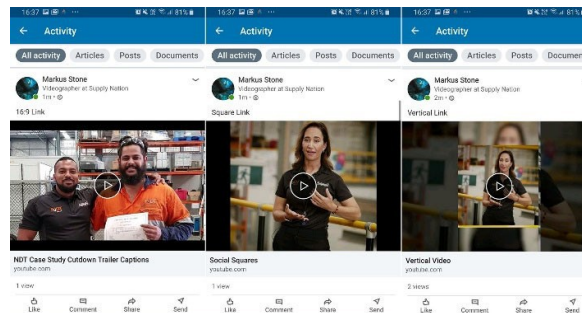


Figure 12 LinkedIn feed with Youtube links

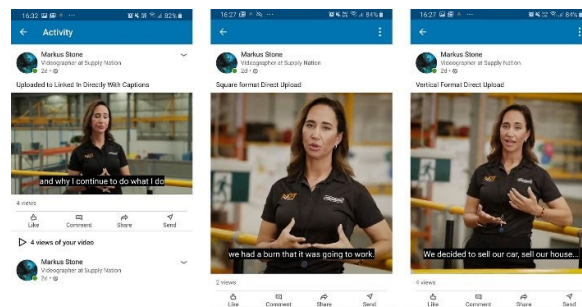


Figure 13 LinkedIn feed with direct uploads via the interface

When viewed fullscreen the same aspect ratio issues are present.

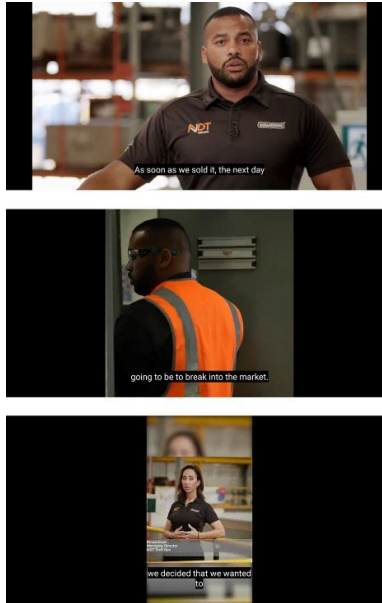


Figure 15 LinkedIn content when viewed in fullscreen Landscape mode.

Captions

LinkedIn allows the user to upload caption files along with the video upload, much the same as YouTube does.

Twitter

Linked videos do not appear as videos, only as links that redirect you to external apps (youtube). To get video to appear, they must be uploaded using the interface by clicking on the 'new tweet' button then selecting the 'media' button to access the file browser. Browse to the file you want and upload.

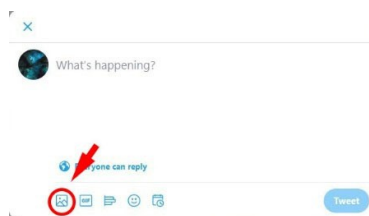


Figure 16 Twitter 'add image' handle supports video

In the feed content appears as below:

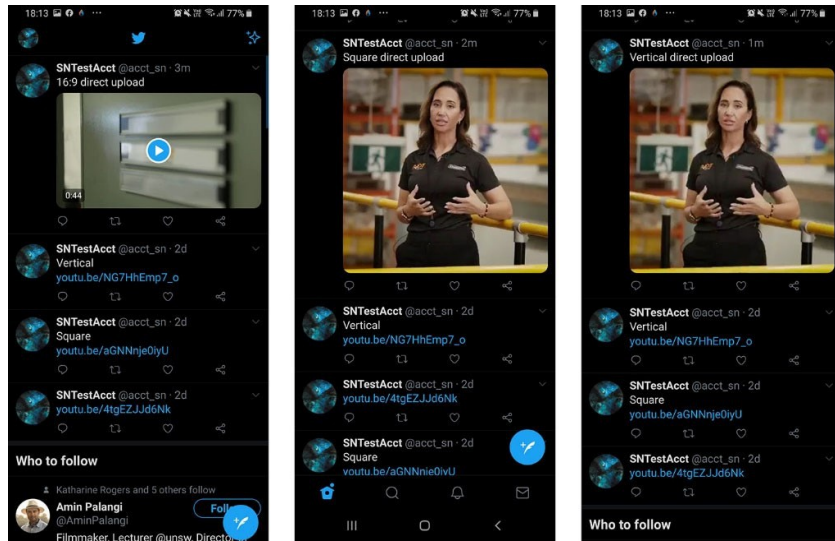


Figure 17 Twitter Feeds via direct upload (the Youtube Links can be seen below the images)

It is possible to view the feed in landscape format, as seen below, though the interface is clunky.

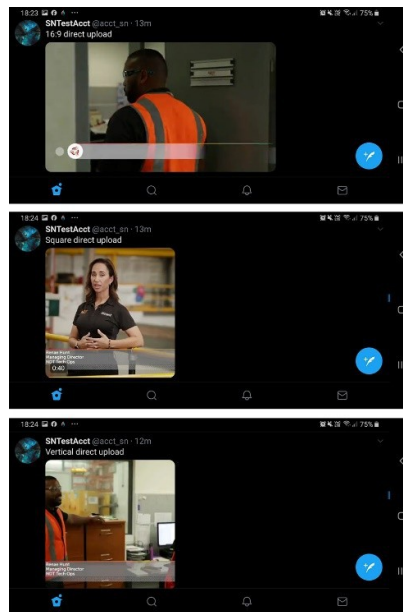


Figure 18 Twitter feed viewed in Landscape mode

When viewed in fullscreen, the same aspect ratio issues are present.

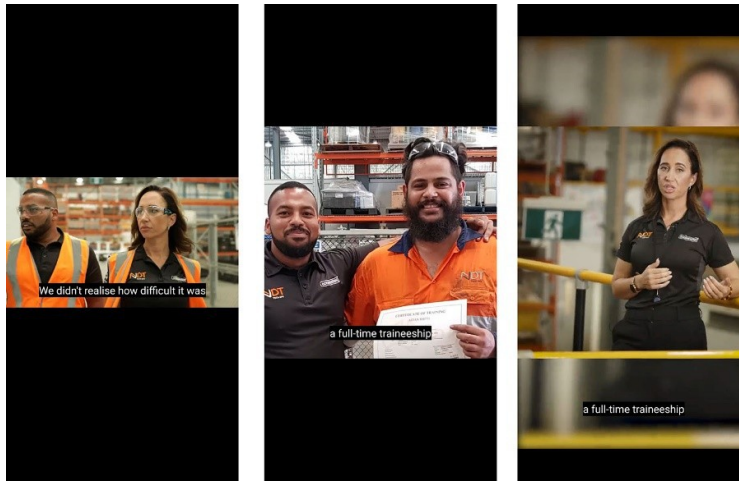


Figure 20 Twitter content viewed in Fullscreen Portrait format

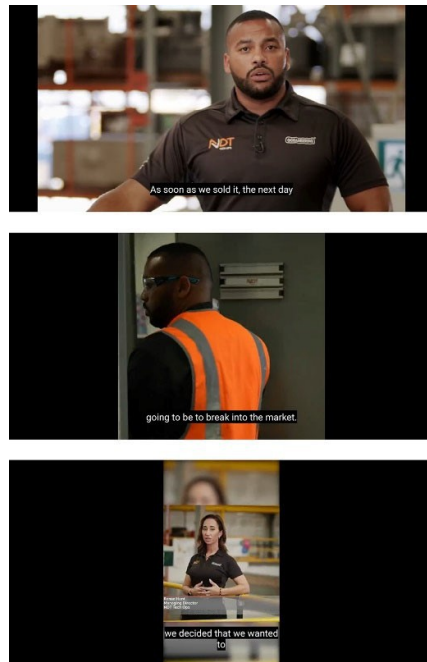


Figure 19 Twitter content viewed in fullscreen Landscape format

Captions

It is possible to add closed captions to Twitter Videos using their proprietary software called 'Twitter Media Studio', but access is by invitation only. My understanding is that it allows the use of closed captions. Without access to Media Studio, the only option is burned in open captions.

Analysis

I have created a matrix (Appendix 1) which summarises the above, to allow us to see at a glance which option grants the best real estate and the options for captions.

This enables us to observe some common trends:

Feed Previews

To grab user's attention it would make sense to have the most attention grabbing visuals.

- Content directly uploaded to the platform appears much larger than the preview images associated with youtube links.
- Content directly uploaded to the platform presents best in Square or Vertical formats.

Fullscreen Mode

If people are interested enough to want to see the video in fullscreen we should offer the biggest user experience.

- When people click through to watch a video in fullscreen *landscape* mode, *16:9 widescreen* is the format used by all platforms (except Instagram which doesn't offer landscape functionality) because it fills the screen.
- When people click through to watch a video in *portrait* mode (mobile devices only, obviously) *vertical* format gives the largest video experience. This makes sense as vertical format is the inverse of widescreen format and fills the screen in portrait mode.
- The exception is Youtube, where a widescreen format video opened on a device in portrait mode will force the display to landscape mode, forcing the user to rotate the display. You could say that both formats yield the largest screen area for viewing in full screen.

Captions

- Closed captions (which can be turned off by the viewer) are only available on Youtube and LinkedIn.
- Any Youtube content posted as links will inherit the closed caption capability of that platform.
- Direct uploads to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram do not have closed caption capability and must be 'burned in' to the video. Users cannot turn them off.

Production constraints

- While it is possible to make vertical format videos with professional equipment, it really is the realm of smartphone videography, and thus more suited for stories and impromptu, unofficial communications (if used at all). Video production generally is set up to work with the widescreen standard and although video *could* be shot that way, it is not practical to do both, and one format must be chosen over the other.
- Vertical video as a format would preclude the use of 3rd party footage being included in the program.
- Either a widescreen or a vertical video can be cropped to produce a square video with no loss of resolution, however you cannot crop widescreen to produce a vertical video (or vice versa) without loss of resolution.

User habit

There are a lot of sites on the internet claiming various statistics, such as '85% of Facebook videos are watched with the sound off', or '90% of Twitter engagement originates from a mobile device'. While I have no reason to doubt the above, some thought needs to be given to how we think our users will interact with our content. For example;

- Does our typical user interact with Twitter from a PC or a mobile device?
- Will a user following a youtube link in their feed to a widescreen video reorient their phone to landscape mode?
- Is it better to catch the eye with a larger preview but offer a slightly smaller video experience on click through, or sacrifice a smaller preview image for a larger video experience?
- How many viewers will click through to view a video in full-screen compared to watching it in their feed?

Recommendations

- Where possible, content should be uploaded to each platform individually using their own interface, not Youtube links, as it produces larger preview images in the feeds of all platforms. There is an overhead here of uploading one video several times to each platform.
- Captions should be added to videos going forwards. Closed captions where available, and burned in where it is not.
- Captions should be retrospectively activated on all current content by changing the options in Youtube and making use of their free captioning feature.
- Since many people will first interact with our content in a feed, it makes sense to capture as much on-screen real estate as possible. In some cases that means finding a balance between the extremes of Widescreen versus vertical formats. The difference between a widescreen video and a vertical one is rather large when seen in a feed (even larger when fullscreen), but the difference between either of those and a square format is much less obvious. Therefore I propose square video as a happy medium for Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram. As few people scroll their feeds in landscape mode, and many watch videos directly in the feed in portrait mode, the only downside to this is that PC users will view square videos *if* they also happen to click through to fullscreen mode.

- Square video formats are easily achieved by cropping an existing video with minor tweaks of graphics. In future a square video format with burned in subtitles should be made available in addition to 16:9 widescreen format along with its SRT sidecar captions file.

Appendix 1

Video formats and captions in social media study

Platform	Mode	Upload Method	Device	Device Orientation	Largest Available Image Format	Captions	Notes
Youtube	Preview	Youtube Interface	PC	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	NA	Previews do not autoplay video
			Smartphone	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	NA	
				Portrait	16:9 Widescreen	NA	
	Viewing in page	Youtube Interface	PC	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	Closed Captions	Holding Phone in Landscape mode forces the video to fullscreen landscape mode (see below)
			Smartphone	Portrait	Vertical	Closed Captions	
	Fullscreen	Youtube Interface	PC	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	Closed Captions	Opening vertical videos in fullscreen will force the display to portrait mode
Smartphone			Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	Closed Captions		
			Portrait	Vertical	Closed Captions	Opening widescreen videos in fullscreen will force the display to landscape mode	

Facebook	Preview in Feed	Link	PC	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	NA	All youtube links preview with same size small square with cropping to fit. Only Square format remains uncropped
			Smartphone	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	NA	
				Portrait	16:9 Widescreen	NA	
	Fullscreen	Link	Any	Any	See Youtube (above)	Closed Captions	FB's UI is not designed to facilitate landscape feed viewing on mobile devices
	(on Youtube) Preview in Feed	Facebook Interface	PC	Landscape	Square	Burned in only	Previews in feed may autoplay depending on user settings
			Smartphone	Landscape	NA (see note)	Burned in only	
				Portrait	Vertical	Burned in only	
	Click-through Viewing (almost fullscreen)	Facebook Interface	PC	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	Burned in only	
	Fullscreen	Facebook Interface	Smartphone	Landscape	16:9 Widescreen	Burned in only	

Click-through Viewing
(almost fullscreen)

Portrait

Vertical
Burned in only

