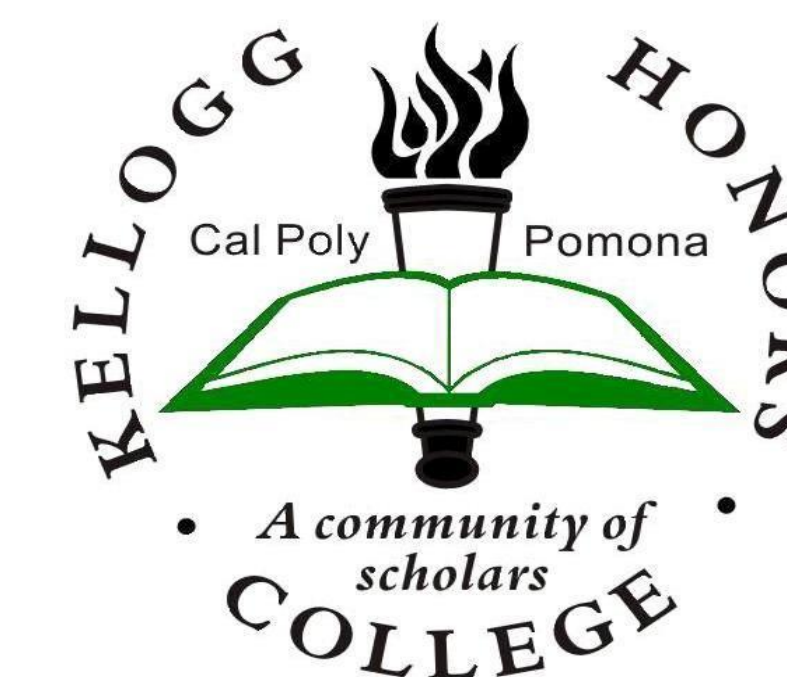


YouTube and Ethics: Users' Understanding of the Ethical Dilemma on YouTube and the Moral Obligations of Content Creators



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Abstract

The desire to become the next big YouTube star has spurred much competition among content creators to produce extraordinary videos that enables one to shine through the infinite, vast YouTube world. However, the term “extraordinary” is interpreted by some YouTubers as being “dramatic”; thus, unethical doings to generate viewership and gain subscribers emerged from the intentional creating or reporting of dramas. As a result, the so-called “YouTube Drama” —a phenomenon in the YouTube community where YouTubers intentionally create dramatic videos to attract views— was born and had become the hot topic in April 2016. The purpose of this study was to understand how users comprehend unethical behaviors in the YouTube community. This study used qualitative content analysis to categorize 561 comments of DramaAlert, KSI, Markiplier, and PewDiePie videos. The likes and dislikes of the videos and comments were examined to determine whether users recognize the ethical dilemma behind DramaAlert and how users reacted to other YouTubers’ dialogue about “YouTube Drama”. The study found users generally exhibit focus more on the YouTubers’ delivery style and possess a passive attitude towards DramaAlert and the “YouTube Drama” phenomenon despite they were concerned with the ethical issues behind the channel and the current condition of YouTube. The research concluded by providing suggestions for improvement on the ethical dilemma currently confronting in the YouTube community.

RQ1: Do Youtube users recognize the ethical dilemma behind DramaAlert, a channel that based its content on the personal affairs of other YouTubers?

RQ2: How do viewers of YouTubers respond to or make sense of the ethical implications of the “YouTube Drama” phenomenon?

Ethics in the YouTube Community



- Social media, unlike traditional media, is not socially controlled and consulted (1) to contain certain information from the public, (2) to achieve solidarity in society, and (3) to influence social upbringing (Hidri, 2012)
- Singer and Ashman (2009) have found that the major concerns journalists have for user-generated content are authenticity, credibility, freedom, and autonomy. In another instance, Mortensen’s (2014) study reveals that professional photojournalists distrust citizen photojournalists due to their lack of ethical knowledge, even though citizen photojournalists have an impression that their own practices may actually be more ethical in some ways than those of professionals.
- YouTube encompasses multiple purposes: advertisement, archival work, education, entertainment (Soukup, 2014), journalism (Braun & Gillespie, 2011), and political communication.
- YouTube is also a public space where people’s live are exhibited, shared, and commented on, a playground where creativity is flourished, and a cultural public sphere where emotions and sentiments are expressed through collective behavior (Chu, 2009).
- From the social perspective, Banaji (2013) suggested that YouTube serves as (1) a channel for people to validate and express their views

(McCosker & Johns, 2014), as (2) an uncurated resource for citizenship education, and as (3) a therapeutic resource for coping with stressful social interactions.

- YouTube reaches more 18-49 year olds than any cable networks in the United States, with the average user spending 40 minutes on YouTube per session when accessed on a mobile device (YouTube 2016)
- Guo and Lee (2013) suggest YouTube’s “LOL or Leave” principle has contributed much to the high elimination rate in the YouTube world.
- Hess (2009) and McCosker & Johns (2014) assert that due to the playful environment of YouTube, the likelihood for serious discussions and examination about sensitive issues is impeded.
- Under YouTube’s policy, users are prohibited to upload content that include sexually explicit material, graphic violence, copyrighted material, disgusting or shocking material, hate speech, harassment, threats; invasion of personal information, spam, and impersonation
- “YouTube Heroes,” introduced in September 2016, also allows volunteer contributors to flag down videos that violate YouTube’s policy and earn points toward different rewards at various level (YouTube Help, 2016).

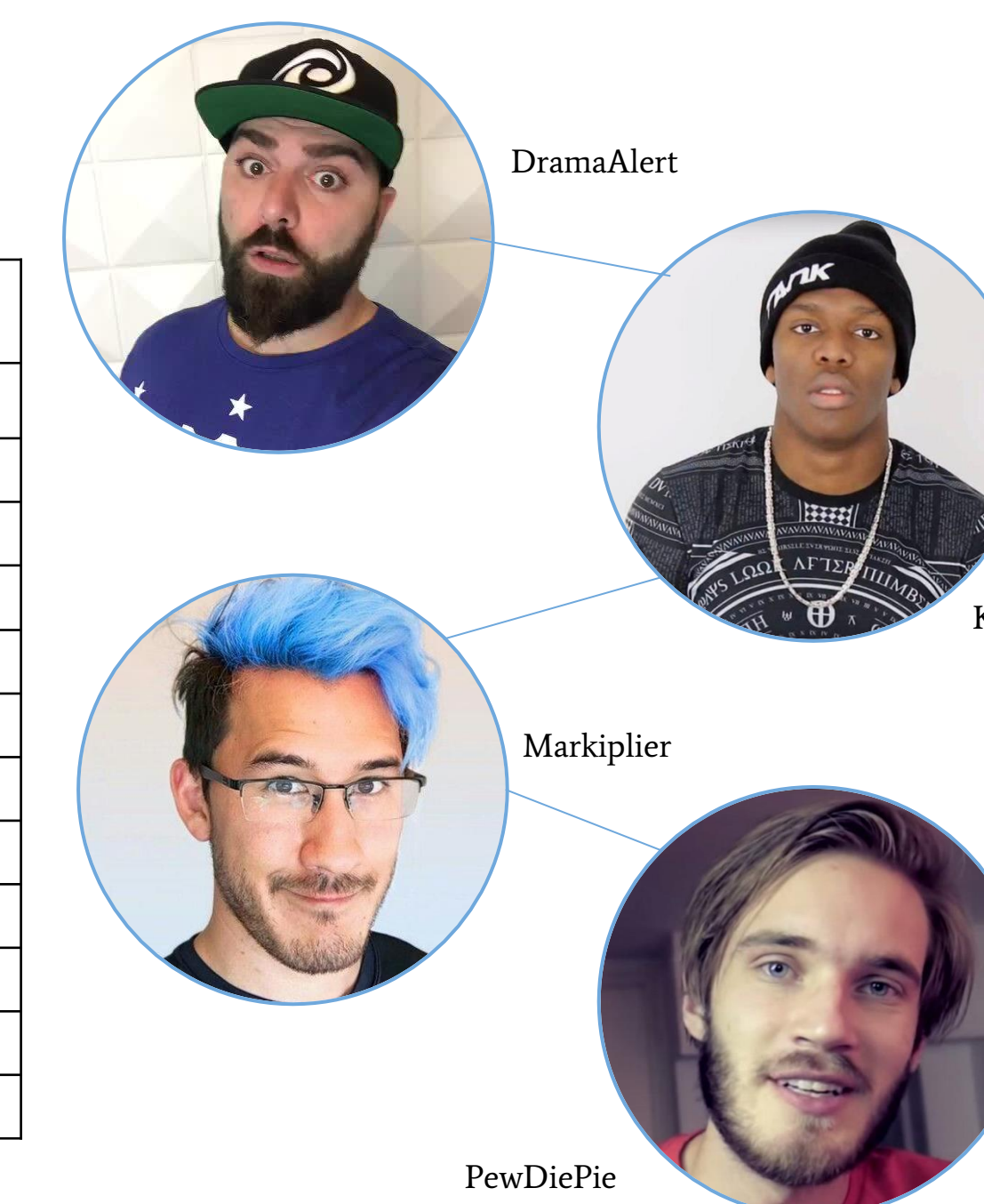
Results

Table 1.
Percentage of Comments by Categories (DramaAlert, KSI, Markiplier, and PewDiePie)

Video Title	Video Category	Positive	Negative	Questioning YouTuber's Behavior	Call of Action	Sarcasm	YouTube System/ Community	Other (YouTuber/ Video)	Other (relevant individuals)	# of Comments
DramaAlert #1	Misunderstanding	16.27%	30.02%	6.97%	2.32%	11.62%	0%	13.95%	18.60%	43
DramaAlert #2	Complaints	16.66%	60.41%	0%	0%	12.50%	0%	8.33%	2.08%	48
DramaAlert #3	Interview	15.21%	12.04%	0%	0%	2.17%	0%	43.47%	26.08%	46
DramaAlert #4	New products	17.77%	48.88%	0%	0%	11.11%	0%	15.55%	6.66%	45
DramaAlert #5	Threat	10.41%	29.16%	0%	0%	12.50%	0%	29.16%	18.75%	48
DramaAlert #6	Confession	12.76%	44.68%	4.25%	2.12%	17.02%	0%	4.25%	14.89%	47
DramaAlert #7	Scandal	19.56%	39.13%	2.17%	4.34%	2.17%	0%	17.39%	15.21%	46
DramaAlert #8	Fans	13.04%	19.56%	0%	0%	6.52%	2.17%	28.26%	30.43%	46
KSI	N/A	10.41%	52.08%	6.25%	0%	0%	2.08%	8.33%	20.83%	48
Markiplier	N/A	25%	29.16%	0%	0%	4.16%	12.5%	18.75%	10.41%	48
PewDiePie#1	N/A	18.36%	4.08%	0%	0%	0%	2.04%	61.22%	14.28%	49
PewDiePie#2	N/A	27.65%	4.25%	0%	0%	2.12%	0%	59.57%	6.38%	47

Table 2.
Total Number of Comments, Views, Likes and Dislikes of Videos from DramaAlert, KSI, Markiplier, and PewDiePie as of November 22nd, 2016

Title	Comments N	Views N	Likes		Dislikes	
			N	%	N	%
DramaAlert #1	5,401	596,016	25,868	47.16%	28,973	52.83%
DramaAlert #2	8,994	620,747	41,834	62.77%	24,806	37.22%
DramaAlert #3	9,291	440,692	26,908	73.03%	9,933	26.96%
DramaAlert #4	12,378	669,775	42,013	44.32%	52,768	55.67%
DramaAlert #5	5,202	532,548	35,333	83.52%	6,968	16.47%
DramaAlert #6	15,322	593,781	51,874	79.38%	13,467	20.61%
DramaAlert #7	6,244	676,321	39,774	81.41%	9,078	18.58%
DramaAlert #8	4,844	562,365	32,428	83.31%	6,492	16.68%
KSI #1	68,857	3,122,319	280,995	89.63%	32,490	10.36%
Markiplier #1	84,512	5,777,124	310,971	91.78%	27,837	8.21%
PewDiePie #1	34,485	4,660,174	521,068	98.01%	10,570	1.98%
PewDiePie #2	52,803	5,258,003	390,815	95.95%	16,474	3.50%



Conclusion

Through the codification of comments, the likes range of each comment, and the number of likes and dislikes received in each video, the results revealed that while viewers of DramaAlert recognized the ethical issues with Keemstar’s news reporting, they were passive in implementing changes to improve the current situation. The results also found that viewers were critical of YouTubers and believed they were the main impactors of the “YouTube Drama” phenomenon. In cases where “YouTube Drama” was presented in a serious manner, users continued to express a sense of hopelessness in reverting YouTube back to the “good old days.” Yet, when taken the issue too lightly, as with PewDiePie’s videos, users often overlooked the true intention of the video and focused on the delivery style instead.

As more viewers become content creators on YouTube, competition in the YouTube arena also intensifies each year. Some YouTubers begin to intentionally create dramas to increase viewership and subscription rate, and as a result, ethical principles are violated. While viewers carry the same level of capability in influencing YouTubers’ video content, the responsibility of practicing ethical behavior when making videos is automatically placed on the content creator as suggested by the study result. Although it would be ideal if YouTube were to take a stricter approach in scrutinizing YouTubers and their videos so all policies are followed through properly, it is simply impossible and unconvincing for YouTube to commit to such responsibility willingly. Perhaps it is more appropriate to begin the change with known YouTubers by encouraging them to be the change agents of this phenomenon and use the normative guideline developed by Wasserman and Ward (2010) along with Bowen’s (2013) Ethical Guidelines for Using Social Media as their principle in publishing works on YouTube. Gradually, as the effort to eliminate YouTube Drama gains momentum, users should begin voicing their content preferences, which in turn would shift the negative climate of YouTube. Finally, YouTube should strengthen their system by establishing stricter requirements and standards for content creators before one becomes a paid professional YouTuber.