

Austin Goodenough



Why YouTube

LOST ITS TOUCH

WITH THE COMMUNITY IN 2018





Table of Contents



Pictured: Jimmy Fallon and the Roots in a cameo appearance for YouTube (2013) Rewind 2013.

1,

Introduction

3

ABOUT THIS ZINE

4

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUTUBE

4

2,

ElsaGate

6

ELSAGATE DEFINED

7

CHEATING THE SYSTEM

8

RESPONSES FROM YOUTUBE & THE
COMMUNITY

10

3,	The Adpocalypse	11
	THE 2017 ADVERTISER BOYCOTT	12
	PEWDIEPIE: THE SITE'S LARGEST ANTI-SEMITES?	13
	YOUTUBE'S CONTROVERSIAL RESPONSE	14
	LOGAN PAUL AND THE SUICIDE FOREST	15
4,	The Current State of YouTube	16
	ADVERTISED SCAMS, ON THE RISE	17
	IT'S REWIND TIME	18
	YOUTUBE REWIND REACTION PERCENTAGE BY YEAR	19
	CENSORING CRITICISM THROUGH COPY-STRIKES AND SCARE TACTICS	20
II	References	21



1,

Introduction

I am Austin Goodenough, a third-year Journalism major (on a five-year plan) at the Rochester Institute of Technology. I was diagnosed on the autism spectrum when I was three, with doctors claiming that I would never speak nor take care of myself. Over time however, I have since broke almost every stereotype of low-functioning autistic people.

ABOUT THIS ZINE

This zine is the result of a term project for my Technology-Mediated Communication course, taught by Hinda Mandell from RIT's School of Communication. Per her requests, the zines produced by myself and my classmates are to explore our relationship to digital devices and platforms, hence why I decided to cover how I no longer find YouTube to be as appealing as it once was.

My mission for this zine is to first give context on some of the major issues the platform has faced in recent years and then go over how they were responded to, not just by YouTube staff, but also the community as a whole. My vision for this zine is for readers to not only make sense of these particular issues, but also persuade them into considering if what they're doing on the platform is viable or not in terms of revenue and/or entertainment.

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUTUBE

I first got into watching YouTube videos in 2009 due to how the site's users could not only become pop culture icons overnight, but were also able to make a decent living off of their videos (see next page for examples). Not only was I able to watch these videos anytime, anywhere, but I could also watch them without dealing with commercials.

But in more recent years, the quality of these videos has since decreased and many creators weren't making as much as they once were from their content. This is primarily a result of these issues, which I will explain in further detail...



Gary Brolsma's (2006) "Numa Numa" garnered over 31 million views and was later featured in a Super Bowl commercial (Brolsma, 2010).

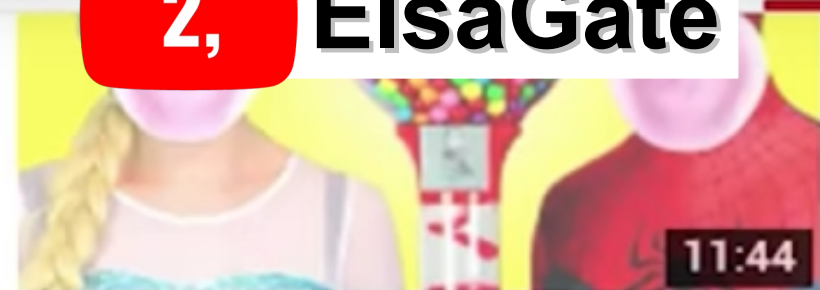


Tay Zonday's (2007) hit single "Chocolate Rain" gained over 120 million views and was later remixed into a music video featuring Boyz II Men on the Comedy Central series "Tosh.0 (Zabielski, 2011)."



The "Bed Intruder Song (Gregory et al., 2010)," a remix of Kevin Antoine Dodson's popular television interview with over 142 million views allowed for him to appear on popular movies and television programs like "Lopez Tonight (Lopez, 2011)."

2, ElsaGate



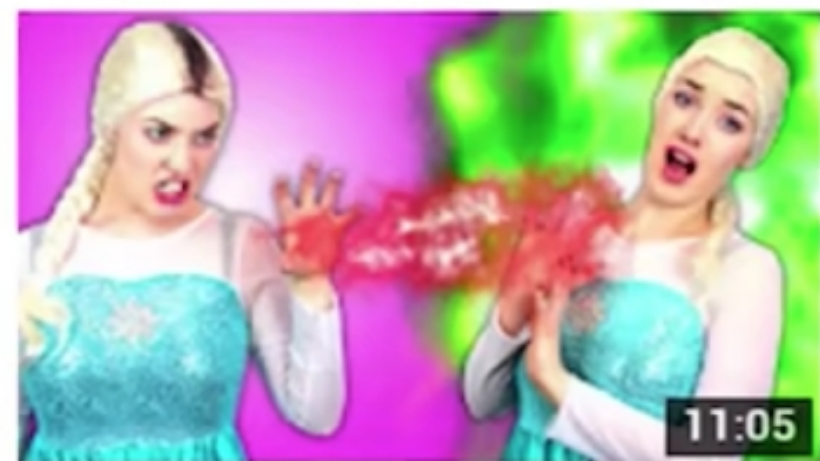
Spiderman & Frozen Elsa vs Joker! w/ Pink Spidegirl Anna &...

118,843,217 views • 1 month ago



Spiderman & Frozen Elsa vs Joker! w/ Pink Spidegirl, Anna &...

17,585,506 views • 1 month ago



Spiderman & Frozen Elsa vs EVIL



Spiderman, Elsa & Anna & Pink

“She wanted to pretend to be a baby a lot. She was 3. She threw tantrums when I wouldn’t let her watch the videos anymore. She was supervised when we did watch them, but always wanted me to click on ones that involved toilets and crying children.” - One of the many parents who shared their stories on the ElsaGate subreddit (Mujezinovic, 2017).

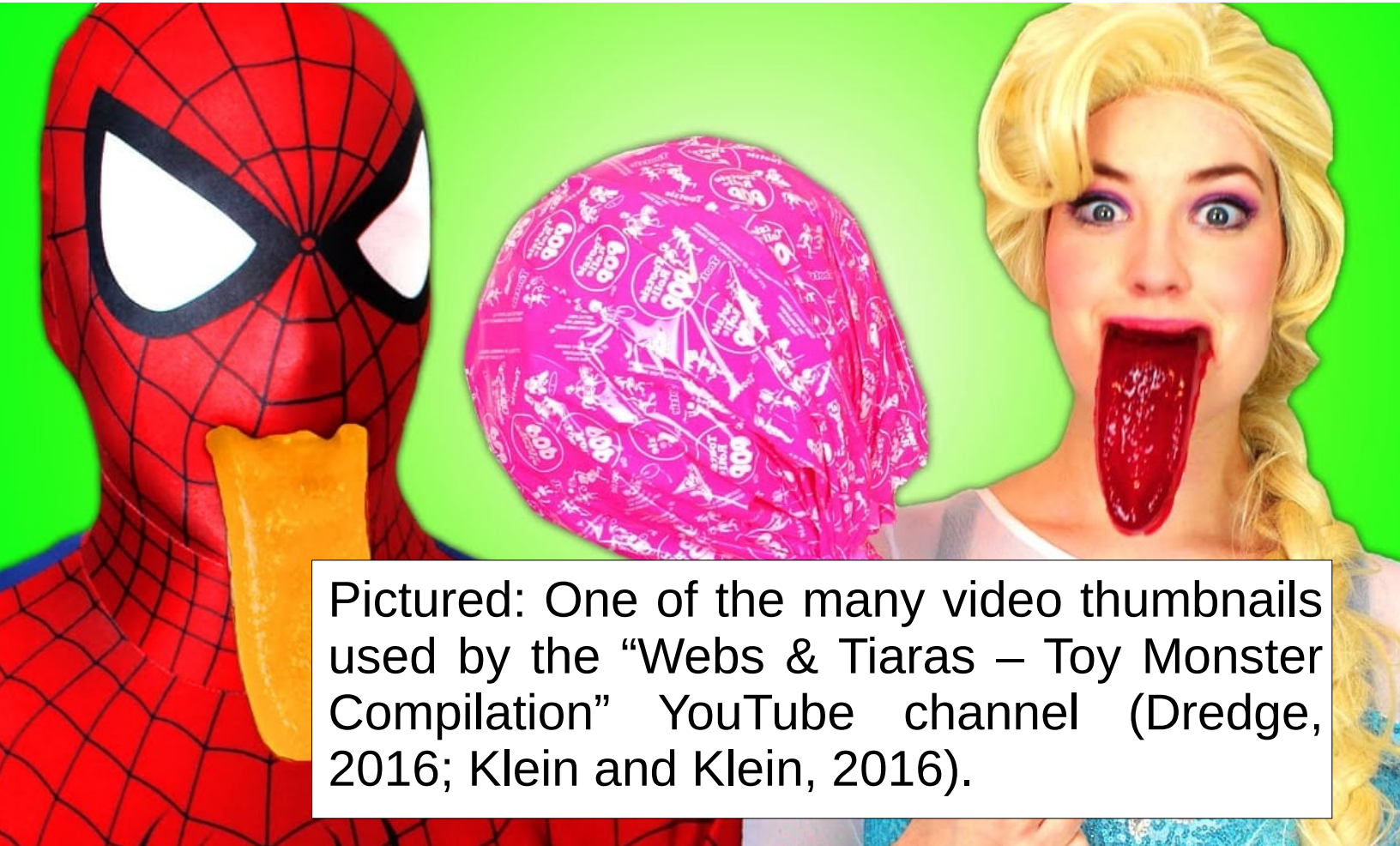
Pictured: A knockoff video with characters from the Canadian children's cartoon "PAW Patrol" dying. (Maheshwari, 2017)



ELSAGATE DEFINED

The term “ElsaGate,” refers to a controversy surrounding YouTube videos that are supposedly “child-friendly,” yet contain themes deemed inappropriate for children to watch. The term itself is a derivative of **Elsa**, the main character from Disney’s “Frozen,” and the **Gate** suffix, derived from the Watergate scandal to describe scandals or controversies (Mujezinovic, 2017).

These videos range from crude digital animations like the one pictured above (Maheshwari, 2017), to live-action films that either feature children and/or beloved children’s characters in nonsensical acts or stunts. Many of said stunts



Pictured: One of the many video thumbnails used by the “Webs & Tiaras – Toy Monster Compilation” YouTube channel (Dredge, 2016; Klein and Klein, 2016).

are often violent, gory, sexually suggestive, sexually abusive, and are believed by many to condition children into believing that said acts are perfectly normal (Dredge, 2016; Mujezinovic, 2017).

CHEATING THE SYSTEM

In May, 2016, the Canadian-based YouTube channel “Webs & Tiaras – Toy Monster Compilation” became the third-most viewed worldwide with over 544 million views. (Dredge, 2016). But since their very first video was uploaded two months prior, allegations arose claiming that these views were artificially inflated.

Among these concerned individuals were YouTubers Ethan and Hila Klein (2016), who found numerous oddities

AMY MULLIGAN

BEAUTY & LIFESTYLE



LinhLinh Finger Family

SUBSCRIBE

HOME

VIDEOS

PLAYLISTS

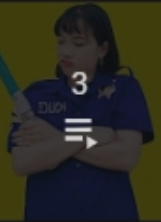
Pictured: Amy Mulligan's (2018) original YouTube channel after being hacked this past November.

Created playlists



Bonbon

VIEW FULL PLAYLIST (3 VIDEOS)



Ipt

VIEW FULL PLAYLIST (7 VIDEOS)



Baby Doll Finger

VIEW FULL PLAYLIST (4 VIDEOS)



A&J VLOGS

SUBSCRIBE

RELATED CHANNELS



CindyLou Bindi

aside from the possible viewbotting after a thorough investigation of these videos. Some of these oddities included users not being able to like or dislike these videos, and most of their comments were either gibberish or in languages other than English. The only thing they didn't take into account was how these videos contain highly searched terms in both their titles and descriptions as a way of being recommended to more children.

Even though the "Webs & Tiaras" channel was banned afterwards, similar channels are gradually appearing either by creating new accounts or compromising preexisting ones (pictured above). A well-known occurrence of the former

Happened this past November, when Amy Mulligan (2018), after owning a beauty channel for five years, was hacked and later uploaded similar content under the name of “LinhLinh Finger Family.” With how bad this issue has become, I highly recommend enabling two-factor authentication on your account to prevent it from being compromised.

RESPONSES FROM YOUTUBE AND THE COMMUNITY

On November 22, 2017, YouTube’s Vice President of Product Management, Johanna Wright (2017), addressed the many steps the site is taking to counteract this massive influx of controversial content. Many of these channels were eventually terminated, and the videos themselves were either removed, age-restricted or demonetized, if not already taken down due to violating US copyright law. There have also been instances where sexual and/or predatory comments were placed on certain videos that featured minors, so they have not only blocked said comments, but also reported such inappropriate behavior to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Many concerned parents have even taken action against these videos, either by deleting the app entirely or having their children use the platform sporadically (Maheshwari, 2017). Some have even shared their stories on digital platforms such as the ElsaGate subreddit (Mujezinovic, 2017).

3,

The Adpocalypse



"We can still make videos on our channel and make ten--fifteen percent of what we used to, but it's still enough because we have enough views. But no one, no channel will ever become popular on YouTube again that makes similar content." - YouTubers Ethan and Hila Klein (2017) on how creators are affected by the 2017 advertiser boycott.

No one doubts Jihad should now be waged inside Kenya which is legally a warzone



Pictured: An advertisement for Sandals Resorts appearing on a Jihadist YouTube video (Mostrous, 2017).



THE 2017 ADVERTISER BOYCOTT

After finding that their advertisements were being placed on extremist videos (Mostrous, 2017), many British-based brands, along with the British government, have pulled their ads from YouTube on March 20, 2017 (Weiss, 2017a). Over time, many American and/or British-based brands have followed suit by pulling their ads, in what many creators have dubbed as the “Adpocalypse (Statt, 2017a; Statt, 2017b; Weiss, 2017b).”

Many big-name YouTubers have lost up to 99% of their usual ad revenue as a result of this boycott (Klein and Klein, 2017). While some were able to continue what they were doing through crowdfunding campaigns on Patreon (Gutelle, 2017), others have since moved their programming over to other digital platforms like Twitch (Weiss, 2017b).

Pictured: Felix “PewDiePie” Kjellberg reacting to a video he paid, where two Indian men laughed while holding a banner that said “Death to all Jews” (Winkler et al., 2017)



PEWDIEPIE: YOUTUBE'S LARGEST ANTI-SEMITIC?

One possible cause of the ‘Adpocalypse’ occurred on January 11, 2017, when Felix “PewDiePie” Kjellberg, a Swedish YouTuber who currently has the most subscribers on the platform, reacted to a video he purchased featuring two Indian men laughing while holding a banner that said “Death to all Jews.” This was one of nine videos Kjellberg uploaded containing anti-semitic jokes or Nazi imagery since August that same year, according to the Wall Street Journal (Winkler et al., 2017).

Though Kjellberg did immediately apologize in that same video by claiming that “it was just a joke (Mahdawi, 2017),” his partnership with Disney’s Maker Studios ended the following week. Kjellberg’s stunt was also praised by

many prominent white supremacists like Andrew Anglin, the editor for an American Neo-Nazi news site, Daily Stormer, which had their motto changed to “the world’s #1 PewDiePie fansite” on January 22, 2017 (Mahdawi, 2017).

YOUTUBE’S CONTROVERSIAL RESPONSE

YouTube has since introduced a series of safeguards for marketers to restrict their advertisements from being placed on videos that feature “tragedy and conflict,” “sensitive social issues,” “sexually suggestive content” and/or “profanity and rough language (Weiss, 2017b).” The site also changed the requirements for their partnership program, which enables creators to earn ad revenue on their videos, so partners have to generate 4,000 hours of watch time and have 1,000 subscribers within twelve months (Humphries, 2018).

While newer YouTubers were struggling to meet these new partnership requirements, existing channels were only given thirty days to meet said requirements to remain partnered (Roberson, 2017). Yet even if the requirements were met, their videos would automatically be flagged if the site’s new algorithm deemed it to not be “advertiser-friendly.”

This new algorithm generated a lot of false positives upon initial release, so Google encouraged YouTubers to manually appeal these flags so the system can be improved. While some creators have taken this route so they can get their ad revenue back, others were still pumping out controversial content that only worsened this very issue...



Pictured: Logan Paul filming a video of him and his friends laughing and joking next to a dead body in Japan's notorious suicide forest (Nedelman, 2018).

LOGAN PAUL AND THE SUICIDE FOREST

On December 31, 2017, Logan Paul uploaded a video of him and his friends laughing and joking next to a dead body in Aokigahara, a Japanese forest where suicides commonly occur (Nedelman, 2018). This video was met with immediate backlash from the community, with some members signing petitions for his channel to be deleted (Farokhmanesh, 2018).

Not only were his YouTube Red originals cancelled as a result, Paul was also removed from the Google Preferred program that places ads on the platform's top creators. Despite later apologizing and donating a million dollars to suicide-prevention organizations (Griffin, 2018), YouTube has suspended all ads from Paul's channel after videos were uploaded of him giving a fish CPR and tasing a dead rat.



4,

The Current State of YouTube

"YouTube Rewind, in a way, just turned into a giant ad for YouTube, that's the truth. So, the delta between what YouTubers, creators and audiences want Rewind to be and what YouTube keeps making is clearly why people are so upset." - Tech YouTuber Marques Brownlee (2018) on why the 2018 Rewind was panned by Audiences.



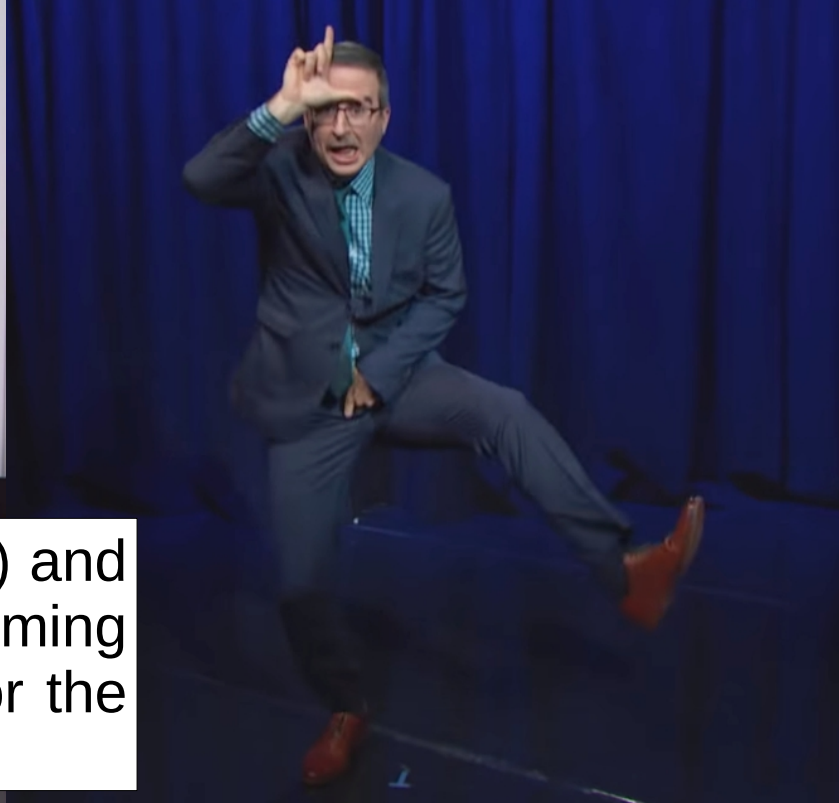
1M V-Bucks - New Method
What is V Bucks V Bucks explained
Ad vbucks
F vbucks

Pictured: An advertisement for a phishing scam claiming that users can earn “free v-bucks” (Alexander, 2018).

ADVERTISED SCAMS, ON THE RISE

Although many advertisers have since returned to the platform following the Adpocalypse, advertisements for scams have been prevalent on the platform since 2018, many of which being uploaded onto hacked or stolen accounts (Alexander, 2018). Most of these ads claimed that users were able to generate in-game currency, such as V-Bucks for Fortnite Battle Royale, by going to a sketchy website or downloading an app or game that would likely steal their credentials.

Even popular YouTubers have come under fire after promoting these scams on their respective channels, like Jake Paul (2018) and Bryan “RiceGum” Le (2018) who uploaded videos promoting a sketchy gambling website, Mystery Brand, to their youthful audiences (Jennings, 2018; Katzowitz, 2018). Although Le apologized for his actions soon afterwards, the damage has already been done to some of his viewers who were forced to pay up to \$40 for their winnings to be shipped, if they were even shipped at all.



Pictured: Trevor Noah (left) and John Oliver (right) performing Fortnite-Related dances for the 2018 YouTube Rewind.

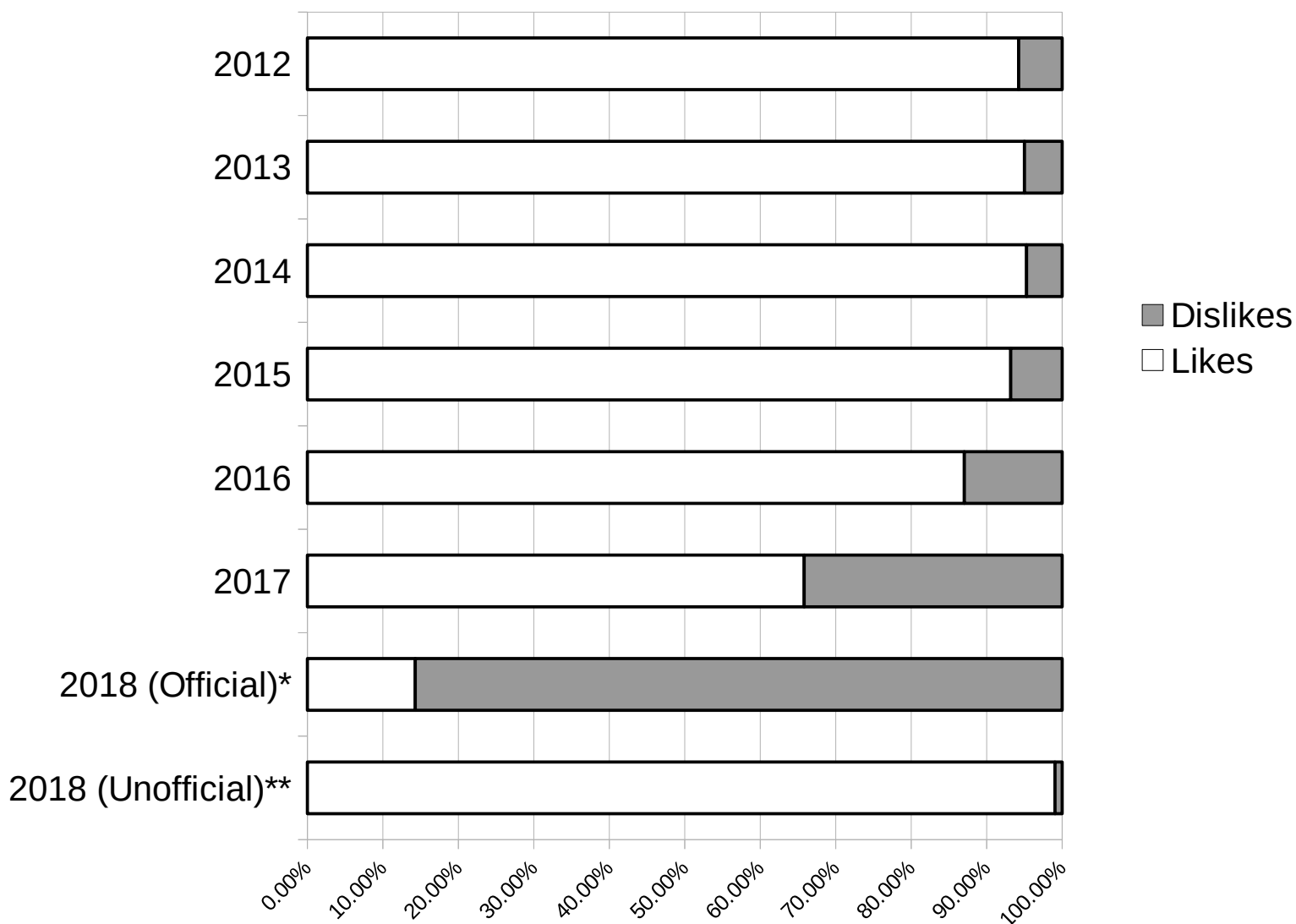
IT'S REWIND TIME

While the quality of advertisements plummeted over the previous year, the quality of the 2018 Rewind basically hit rock bottom (Roose, 2018; YouTube, 2018). With over 15 million dislikes, the 2018 Rewind has since surpassed Justin Bieber's (2006) hit single "Baby" as the most-disliked YouTube video as of December 13, 2018.

While many were social about why the Rewind sucked, namely due to the exclusion of noteworthy events like Logan Paul's boxing match against Olajide "KSI" Olatunji (Roose, 2018), the excessive references to Fortnite and how it all ends to the cringeworthy tune of Pinkfong's (2016) "Baby Shark Dance", Felix "PewDiePie" Kjellberg (2018) went the extra mile by uploading his own version of the 2018 Rewind with all of the trends and memes the original failed to mention (Partis, 2019). And to add insult to injury in the most ironic of ways, Kjellberg's video became the most-liked non-music video on December 30.

YouTube Rewind Reaction Percentage by Year

(Source: YouTube)



*With over 15 million dislikes, YouTube Rewind 2018 surpassed Justin Bieber's (2006) hit song "Baby" as the most disliked YouTube video as of December 13 (Roose, 2018).

**Felix "PewDiePie" Kjellberg (2018) uploaded his own take on the 2018 Rewind on December 27, 2018, which later became the most-liked non-music YouTube video as of December 30, 2018.

CENSORING CRITICISM THROUGH COPY-STRIKES AND SCARE TACTICS

In a video uploaded on January 19, 2019, a 15-year old YouTuber under the username of “LtCobra (2019)” accused the commentary YouTuber “JustDestiny” for clickbaiting by having misleading titles and having suggestive photos of underaged girls in his thumbnails (Kjellberg, 2019). In response to these accusations, “JustDestiny” not only filed a false copyright strike against the video, but also issued a cease-and-desist letter claiming that the video was slanderous (Glaze, 2019).

While the legal threat appears to come from a New York-based litigation department, Nicholas DeOrio and YouTuber Daniel “KEEMSTAR” Keem have debunked the former as false because the listed attorneys are from different states or countries and that the listed address actually leads to an individual’s home. Such fraudulent behavior is classified as a felony under New York state law, and can lead up to a 15-year prison sentence (N.Y. Penal Law § 70.00).

The false copyright strike on “LtCobra’s” original video has since been successfully appealed and all of “JustDestiny’s” false threats never worked out. Despite all this, “JustDestiny” has since offered an ultimatum via Discord by demanding that “LtCobra” publicly apologizes on both Twitter and YouTube for “spreading misinformation,” but it is highly unlikely that “LtCobra” will follow suit due to “JustDestiny’s” fraudulent behavior.



References

Alexander, J. (2018, May 15). What's going on with the Fortnite scams taking over YouTube? *Polygon*.

Bajgrowicz, B. (2018, December 7). K-Pop, 'In My Feelings' Challenge, 'Baby Shark' & More Featured in YouTube's 2018 Rewind: Watch. *Billboard*.

Beiber, J. (2010, February 9), *Justin Beiber - Baby ft. Ludacris* [Video File].

Brolsma, G. [Dork Daily] (2006, December 11), *Numa Numa* [Video File].

Brolsma, G. [Dork Daily] (2010, February 9). *Vizio Super Bowl Ad featuring Gary Brolsma Numa Numa* [Video File].

Brownlee, M. (2018, December 12). *The Problem with YouTube Rewind!* [Video File].

Dredge, S. (2016, June 29). YouTube's latest hit: neon superheroes, giant ducks, and plenty of lycra. *The Guardian*.

Farokhmanesh, M. (2018, February 9). Logan Paul learned nothing. *The Verge*.

Glaze, V. (2019, February 12). PewDiePie lashes out at YouTuber JustDestiny for using underage girls in thumbnails. *Dexerto*.

Gregory, A., Gregory, E., Gregory, S.F., and Gregory, M. [schmoyoho] (2010, July 31). *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* [Video File].

Griffin, A. (2018, January 11). Logan Paul: YouTube Cuts Ties With Controversial Star After ‘Suicide Forest’ Video. *The Independent*

Gutelle, S. (2017, May 1). YouTube Star Philip DeFranco Splits With Group Nine Media, Launches Crowdfunded News Network. *TubeFilter*. Referenced in *Here’s How the YouTube ‘Apocalypse’ Is Affecting Top Creators* by Weiss, G. (2017b, May 4).

Humphries, m. (2018, January 17). Making Money on YouTube Just Got Much Harder. *PCMag*.

Jennings, R. (2019, January 4). YouTube stars promoted gambling to kids. Now they have to answer to their peers. *Vox*.

Katzowitz, J. (2019, January 1). Jake Paul, RiceGum blasted for promoting sketchy AF ‘mystery’ site. *The Daily Dot*.

Kjellberg, F. [PewDiePie] (2018, December 27). *YouTube Rewind 2018 but it’s actually good* [Video File].

Kjellberg, F. [PewDiePie] (2019, February 12). *I’m BANNED for life...* [Video File]. Referenced in *PewDiePie lashes out at YouTuber JustDestiny for using underage girls in thumbnails* by Glaze, V. (2019, February 12).

Klein, E.E. [h3h3Productions] (2018, December 9). *It's Time To Stop YouTube Rewind* [Video File].

Klein, E.E. and Klein, H. [Ethan and Hila] (2016, May 17). *Webs, Tiaras and Bradberries* [Video File]. Referenced in *YouTube's latest hit: neon superheroes, giant ducks, and plenty of lycra* by Dredge, S. (2016).

Klein, E.E. and Klein, H. [h3h3productions] (2017, April 24). *We're at an Important Crossroad in our Lives* [Video File]. Referenced in *Here's How the YouTube 'Apocalypse' Is Affecting Top Creators* by Weiss, G. (2017b, May 4).

Le, B. [RiceGum] (2018, December 31). *How I Got AirPods For \$4* [Video File].

Le, B. [RiceGum] (2019, January 3). *This Dude Calls Me Out For Mystery Unboxing...* [Video File].

LtCobra (2019, January 19). *The Dark Side of JustDestiny* [Video File].

Lopez, G. (2011, January 25). *Epic Fail Insurance with Antoine Dodson* [Video File].

Mahdawi, A. (2017, February 15). PewDiePie thinks 'Death to all Jews' is a joke. Are you laughing yet? [Opinion]. *The Guardian*.

Maheshwari, S. (2017, November 4). On YouTube Kids, Startling Videos Slip Past Filters. *The New York Times*.

Mostrous, A. (2017, February 9). Big brands fund terror through online adverts. *The Times*. Referenced in *Google Apologizes for Ads Appearing on Extremist YouTube Videos In U.K.* by Weiss, G. (2017a, March 20).

Mujezinovic, D. (2017, November 13). YouTube Promises Crackdown On Disturbing And Sexually Violent Gore Videos Targeted At Children [Opinion]. *Inquisitr*.

Mulligan, A. (2018, December 4). *i got hacked*. [Video File].

Nedelman, M. (2018, January 4). Inside Japan's 'suicide forest.' *CNN*.

N.Y. Penal Law § 70.00

Paul, J. (2018, December 30). *I Spent \$5,000 ON MYSTERY BOXES & You WONT Believe WHAT I GOT... (insane)* [Video File].

Partis, D. (2019, January 3). PewDiePie's take on YouTube Rewind 2018 is now the most liked non-music video on the platform. *Influencer Update*.

Pinkfong [Pinkfong! Kids' Songs & Stories] (2016, June 17). *Baby Shark Dance | Sing and Dance! | Animal Songs | PINKFONG Songs for Children* [Video File].

Robertson, A. (2017, October 27). YouTube is fighting the 'adpocalypse' with a less trigger-happy flagging system. *The Verge*.

Roose, K. (2018, December 13). How YouTube's Year-in-Review 'Rewind' Video Set Off a Civil War. *The New York Times*.

Statt, N. (2017a, March 22). AT&T and Verizon pull ads from Google and YouTube over hate speech. *The Verge*.

Statt, N. (2017b, March 24). YouTube is facing a full-scale advertising boycott over hate speech. *The Verge*.

Weiss, G. (2017a, March 20). Google Apologizes for Ads Appearing on Extremist YouTube Videos In U.K. *TubeFilter*. Referenced in *Here's How the YouTube 'Adpocalypse' Is Affecting Top Creators* by Weiss, G. (2017b, May 4).

Weiss, G. (2017b, May 4). Here's How the YouTube 'Adpocalypse' Is Affecting Top Creators. *TubeFilter*.

Winkler, R., Nicas, J., and Fritz, B. (2017, February 14). Disney Severs Ties With YouTube Star PewDiePie After Anti-Semitic Posts. *The Wall Street Journal*. Referenced in *PewDiePie thinks 'Death to all Jews' is a joke. Are you laughing yet?* By Mahdawi, A. (2017, February 5).

Wright, J. (2017, November 22). 5 ways we're toughening our approach to protect families on YouTube and YouTube Kids [Blog Post].

YouTube [YouTube Spotlight] (2012, December 17). *Rewind YouTube Style 2012* [Video File].

YouTube [YouTube Spotlight] (2013, December 11). *YouTue Rewind: What Does 2013 Say?* [Video File].

YouTube [YouTube Spotlight] (2014, December 9). *YouTube Rewind: Turn Down for 2014* [Video File].

YouTube [YouTube Spotlight] (2015, December 9). *YouTube Rewind: Now Watch Me 2015 | #YouTubeRewind* [Video File].

YouTube [YouTube Spotlight] (2016, December 7). *YouTube Rewind: The Ultimate 2016 Challenge | #YouTubeRewind* [Video File].

YouTube [YouTube Spotlight] (2017, December 6). *YouTube Rewind: The Shape of 2017 | #YouTubeRewind* [Video File].

YouTube [YouTube Spotlight] (2018, December 6). *YouTube Rewind 2018: Everyone Controls Rewind | #YouTubeRewind* [Video File].

Zabielski, S. (Director). (2011, May 17). Tay Zonday (Remix) [Television series episode] In Siskel, C. (Producer), Smith, C. (Producer), and Tosh, D. (Producer), *Tosh.0*. New York City: Comedy Central.

Zonday, T. [TayZonday] (2007, April 22). “*Chocolate Rain*” *Original Song by Tay Zonday* [Video File].

Created by Austin Goodenough

PHONE - (585) 730-2937
EMAIL - TheAustinMPG@gmail.com
TWITTER - @OfclyGoodenough

Under the guidance of Hinda Mandell

OFFICE - George Eastman Hall, 3272
PHONE - (585) 475-7723
EMAIL - hbmngpt@rit.edu
TWITTER - @hindamandell

RIT | College of Liberal Arts **School of Communication**

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

WEBSITE - rit.edu/cla
PHONE - (585) 475-2444
(585) 475-2929
FAX - (585) 475-7120
EMAIL - libarts@rit.edu
TWITTER - @RIT_LiberalArts

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION

WEBSITE - rit.edu/cla/communication
TWITTER - @RIT_SOC
INSTAGRAM - @ritsoc