

The Social Assets of **You**Tube

How They Can Be Used
Properly or Improperly

Noah Jensen

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Printed in the United States of America

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS

YouTube is a popular video sharing website where its users can upload and view videos from almost anywhere in the world. Since its purchase in 2006 for 1.65 billion dollars, Google is now the owner of YouTube. YouTube offers organizations, businesses, websites, and content creators the assets needed to either flourish or fail socially. Examples are used of YouTube community members that took advantage of these assets, and achieved success. These examples include Felix Kjellberg (also known as PewDiePie), DeStorm Power, Khan Academy, and Dan Savage's It Gets Better Project. There are also many examples used of unsuccessful YouTube community members that have received backlash or harsh criticisms for using these assets improperly. These include the Invisible Children's Kony 2012 campaign, Sam Pepper, and even Google/YouTube itself. The reasoning behind this accusation is because Google was, and still is, harshly criticized for the process it has in place of policing and removing YouTube videos that violate the website's Terms of Service. It was also denounced in 2013 for forcing its users to merge their existing YouTube accounts with a Google Plus account, Google's primary social networking website.

2 INTRODUCTION

YouTube is a video-sharing website founded in 2005 by three previous PayPal employees. Just one year later, Google purchased YouTube in 2006 for 1.65 billion dollars. Since then, it has become the third most visited website in the world, just behind Google and Facebook (Alexa, 2014). Almost any video can be uploaded to the website from anywhere, and anyone can watch it; YouTube is by far the world's largest video platform. Today, over one hundred hours of video are uploaded to the website every minute, attracting more than one billion unique users every month (YouTube, 2014). Due to its success, the website has drastically changed the lives of many businesses, organizations, and content creators. It has helped other websites become successful, while also leading others to their dissolution and demise.

3 ADVANTAGES

Many content creators have found success essentially overnight from their uploaded videos 'going viral,' often obtaining notoriety and even stardom. In fact, according to a recent survey conducted by Variety magazine, "YouTube stars are more popular than mainstream celebrities among United States teenagers" (Variety, 2014). Over 1,500 teenaged respondents were shown several images of both YouTube celebrities as well as mainstream media celebrities. They were then asked a series of questions regarding the celebrity's approachability, authenticity, and other aspects of their overall influence. A score was assigned to each celebrity based on the respondents' answers to the questions. The results found the top five, and six of the top ten, were all YouTube stars. Looking closer at some of the reasons YouTube stars were voted more popular than mainstream celebrities is important to note. This survey found that teenagers preferred YouTube stars because they appreciate the stars' sincere sense of humor, having the ability to speak what's on their minds with little to no filters, and appreciation when they take risks.

The video hosting website has led to the founding and success of many other websites; one such example is the educational website Khan Academy. Khan Academy was actually started on a YouTube channel in 2006. Helpful educational videos, particularly those relating to mathematics, were posted to the channel daily. By the end of 2013, Khan Academy's YouTube channel had to over 26,000 free educational videos that had

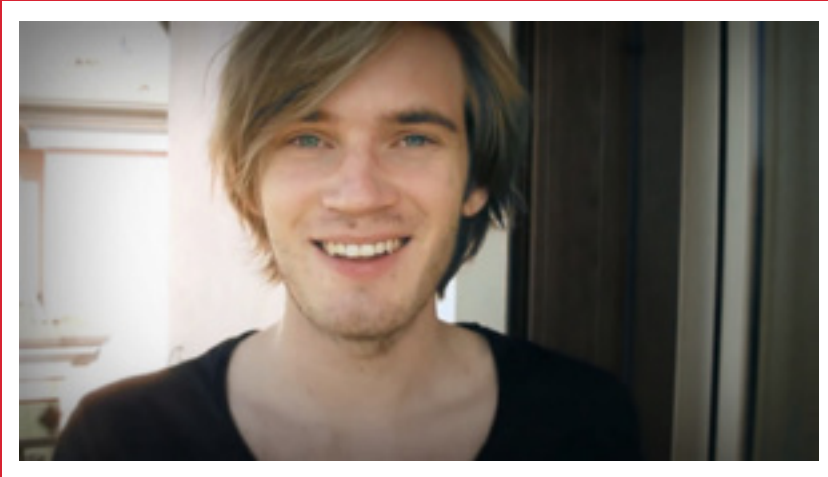
been viewed collectively over 372 million times (YouTube, 2013). Khan Academy's YouTube channel was so successful that its founder, Sal Khan, decided to start an independent website that organized all of their uploaded videos there. Recently in a TED Talk, Khan, stated that his website was "the largest school in the world" (Forbes, 2012). Since the website's creation, Khan Academy has amassed ten million users, which now makes almost two million dollars in revenue per year.



Khan Academy Logo
www.khanacademy.org

It's important to answer one important fundamental question: How does a user make money on YouTube? After all, content creators would simply move their content to other websites if they felt like making videos on YouTube was a bad investment of time and money. Google realized the potential of attracting professional content creators to their website, so they introduced a partner program back in May 2007. This program allows content creators to obtain a portion of a video's ad revenue (about 55%) and share it with YouTube. There are now over a million members in the YouTube partner program, and several of those partners are making six-figure salaries each year. Perhaps the best example of this is of the YouTuber 'PewDiePie,' also known as Felix Kjellberg. Kjellberg is a twenty-four year old video game commentator who has uploaded videos to YouTube since 2010. Kjellberg has become an expert on making videos in the videogame 'let's play' genre. This is essentially a ten to twenty minute video of Kjellberg playing a videogame and recording his reactions or thoughts about the game, while having little to no filter doing so; his jokes are often obscene and vulgar. His viewer demographics consist of mainly preteen and teenage males. He typically plays indie horror style games; many of his videos include him reacting to jump scares and frightening or gruesome scenarios. He quickly became the most subscribed channel on the website, now having surpassed over thirty-one million subscribers (as of October 2014). His channel generated 351 million video views in June 2014 alone. That's more than 8,100 views per minute (The Guardian, 2014)!

He has more subscribers than Justin Bieber and Rihanna combined. Kjellberg's net worth is now at a whopping ten million dollars (celebritynetworth.com, 2014). It's incredible that an ordinary person such as Kjellberg has found stardom in four years on the website, and is now a worldwide phenomenon.



Felix Kjellberg
www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie

Another important example to note is a YouTube personality known by the alias “DeStorm Power.” Power’s channel uses YouTube’s platform to share his songwriting, raps, and singing to now over 1.6 million subscribers. Since his introduction to the website in 2007, he has found major success on not only YouTube, but also in the music industry. He has collaborated with such musical talents as Snoop Dogg, Talib Kweli, and PSY. He has since then founded Forefront.TV, which is a channel network YouTube content creators can join that promotes music and urban lifestyle. Before his big break came on YouTube, however, Power was homeless and living in his car in Harlem, New York. He describes it further in his ‘Draw My Life’ video as he was “getting into a lot of legal trouble... in and out of jail” and that one of his only possessions, his keyboard, was his only “money maker” (YouTube, 2013). Just before his mother passed away, Power was told by her that there was nothing he couldn’t achieve if he set his mind to it, and that he had to take care of the family now. Power saved up enough money from playing music in the subway, and eventually got into contact with somebody in the music industry. After several internships and ghostwriting for Atlantic Records, Universal, and various other record labels, Power decided to leave the industry to attend to his now widespread YouTube fame. Power’s net worth is now estimated to be 2.5 million dollars (Forbes, 2013). His journey from being homeless to a millionaire is quite remarkable; this is something that could only be achieved on YouTube, the most popular video platform in the world.

The popular website has also helped many teenagers and young adults overcome struggles relating to their sexual identity. In 2010, Dan Savage started an anti-bullying campaign on YouTube named the It Gets Better Project to help these individuals feel confident in themselves and their sexual orientations. The movement started in response from the suicides of teenagers who were bullied for being gay or were suspected to be gay. The videos Savage created were meant to prevent these suicides among the LGBT youth, as well as to convey the message that their lives will improve over time. The project saw lots of early success with several hundred videos being uploaded in the first week alone. YouTube used to have a system in place in which a channel could not upload more than 650 videos. YouTube has since lifted this limit, but it's extraordinary to note that Savage's YouTube channel reached this limit within a week from the campaign's launch. The campaign was forced to continue uploading and linking to videos onto a new website. It now includes well over fifty thousand entries from people of all sexual orientations, including several famous celebrities like President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, Ke\$ha, Adam Lambert, and many others (PC magazine, 2010). The campaign was given the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Award at the 64th Primetime Creative Arts Emmy Awards for "strategically, creatively, and powerful utilizing the media to educate and inspire" (Bosenblum, 2012).



It Gets Better Project
www.itgetsbetter.org/



Dan Savage
founder

11 DISADVANTAGES

There are, however, many disadvantages that such a popular website causes. Many websites and organizations did not know how to adapt to the constant increasing popularity of the site, or did not understand how to take advantage of the assets that YouTube has to offer. Because of this, numerous companies have become defunct in some way, or have gotten bad reputation or backlash for improperly using the website. One such example is Invisible Children, Inc. This organization was co-founded by Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole in 2004 to bring awareness to the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Central Africa. Perhaps their most popular video campaign was in March 2012 called Kony 2012. The video asked its viewers to help end the oppression by the LRA and arrest its leader Joseph Kony; by all means, it started out as an extremely successful campaign with lots of news and media attention. All around the world, Kony 2012 was trending on Twitter. However, one of the co-founders Jason Russell was publically arrested on March 15, 2012 at the height of the campaigns popularity. San Diego police detained him for psychiatric evaluation. According to eyewitnesses and a video that was leaked onto YouTube, ironically the same website that hosted the Kony 2012 campaign video, Russell was seen walking around naked in the street shouting profanities. The leaked video was bought out by company TMZ and was shared rapidly on the Internet. Attention then shifted from the campaign to the mentally disturbed co-founder. Further controversy then

started to plague the company as it was discovered that only 2.8 million dollars of the 8.9 million they raised made it to their charity program (only 31 percent). That number is believed to be further whittled down by local Ugandan bureaucracy. Although Invisible Children is still a fairly successful organization today, its efforts for Kony 2012 were hindered by the very same video-sharing platform that had once advertised it.



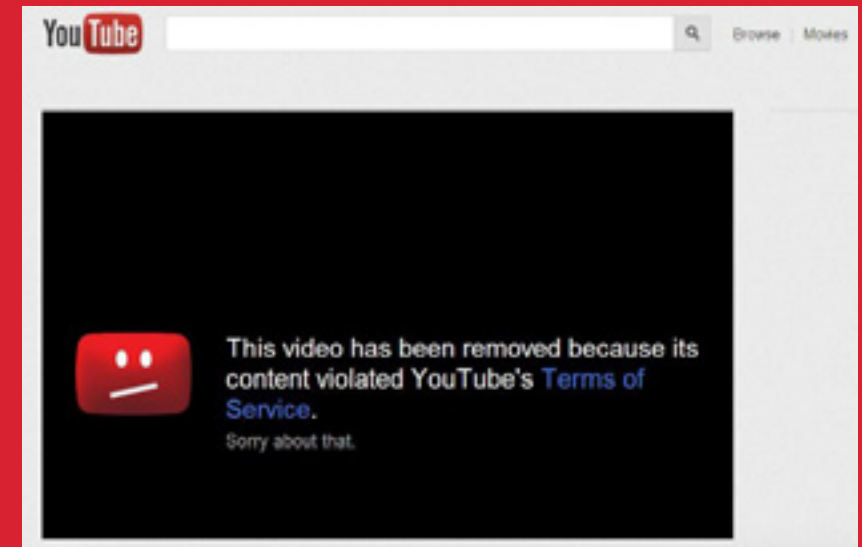
Kony 2012 Campaign Poster
Invisible Children Inc., 2012

Just recently, a famous YouTube personality's life has dramatically changed for the worse. YouTube user Sam Pepper came under fire for soliciting nude photos from a minor. Pepper is a 25-year-old YouTube content creator focusing on 'pranking' videos. He currently has over two million subscribers. A former fan spoke out and posted a YouTube video explaining that she was only fifteen years old when Pepper pressured her to send him the nude photographs. Three other women have since come forward with YouTube videos and stated that they were inappropriately touched or harassed by him. Pepper tried to cover the whole controversy up and posted a video in which he claimed the entire thing was a "social experiment" and that the previous videos were "staged and scripted." Nevertheless, Pepper was still dropped from his network, and his respect within the entire community has plunged. His videos have now gotten more criticisms and complaints, with one user commenting, "Did you know? If you're a horrible person, just claim it was a social experiment, then it's everyone else's problem if they're offended!"

Several people, including sectors of or entire governments, have criticized aspects of YouTube. YouTube's Terms of Service states that it prohibits the posting of videos that violate copyright laws or depict pornography, illegal acts, acts of unjustified violence, or hate speech. However, many of these videos are uploaded every day; a majority of these pass through YouTube's algorithms and filters. YouTube relies on its users to flag videos they believe are in violation of these terms, which are then further reviewed by a YouTube staff member. This process is slow, and can usually take upwards of forty-eight

hours to review the video. Even after all of that time, sometimes the video still isn't taken down successfully. In July 2008, the Culture and Media Committee of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom stated that it was disappointed with this system YouTube has in place. They said that a user-generated website like YouTube should take more initiative in monitoring its website for these types of videos, and that perhaps policing the website should be its number one priority. YouTube responded to these criticisms by stating "We have strict rules on what's allowed, and a system that enables anyone who sees inappropriate content to report it to our 24/7 review team and have it dealt with promptly. We educate our community on the rules and include a direct link from every YouTube page to make this process as easy as possible for our users. Given the volume of content uploaded on our site, we think this is by far the most effective way to make sure that the tiny minorities of videos that break the rules come down quickly" (The Daily Telegraph, 2008).

Another widely criticized feature of YouTube happened in 2013 with the integration of Google's newest social networking platform, Google Plus. Google required its users to merge all of their YouTube information, as well as the comments sections, with their social network in order to continue uploading and commenting on videos. Google Plus, similar to other social networking websites, requires its users to use their real names and contact information. This caused issues for some users because they felt as though their audience knew them through their online alias instead of their real name. Other users didn't want their name changed due to privacy reasons. YouTube co-founder Jawed Karim even posted "Why the fuck do





I need a Google Plus account to comment on a video?” to his newly required Google Plus profile page. The changes were an attempt to give content creators the ability to moderate comments by giving them the ability to block specific words, phrases, or otherwise offensive language. However, Google faced a difficult launch as it was discovered by its users that URLs could now be included in comments (which were previously turned off due to abuse); the amount of spam and bot activity subsequently increased. It was also discovered that there was no character limit for comments posted to videos. Users flooded the website with comments that were several thousand characters long, some even uploaded entire transcripts of books to the website in the comments section.

There has been controversy for the comments section even before the integration of Google Plus. The YouTube community’s comments have often been cited as being some of the most distasteful and unsympathetic when compared to the other top social platforms on the Internet. They attract attention for their negative content as well as their form. In their 2006 Person of the Year issue, Time magazine stated that YouTube comments “harnesses the stupidity of crowds... Some of the comments on YouTube make you weep for the future of humanity just for the spelling alone, never mind the obscenity and the naked hatred” (Time, 2006). The Guardian also described YouTube comments as “Juvenile, aggressive, misspelled, sexist, homophobic, swinging from raging at the contents of a video to providing a pointlessly detailed description followed by a LOL, YouTube comments are a hotbed of infantile debate and unashamed ignorance – with the occasional burst of wit shining through” (The Guardian,

2009). Other publications such as The Daily Telegraph and The Huffington Post note that YouTube is “notorious for some of the most confrontational and ill-formed comment exchanges on the Internet” (The Daily Telegraph, 2008) and its “comments appear offensive, stupid, and crass to the vast majority of the people” (The Huffington Post, 2012). The newly integrated comments system attempted to change this public image of the website’s comments section, but has been for the most part unsuccessful.

The social assets that YouTube has to offer, like many other social networking websites, can be disadvantageous if used improperly. These assets must be carefully evaluated and taken advantage of if one is to succeed on the social video network. Not doing so will most certainly end disastrous for public relations. This is due to the undeniable fact that the website has drastically changed many businesses and organizations, and has certainly changed the lives of content creators. It has the potential to provide success to other websites, while also leading to the ruin of others.

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21 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Back in 2005, three PayPal employees developed an idea for an interactive video-sharing website known today as YouTube. One of the founders, Jawed Karim, said in an interview that the inspiration for YouTube first came after the 2004 Super Bowl “wardrobe malfunction” incident. Unfortunately, Karim could not easily find video clips of the event online. He wanted to create a way to not only share the video with others, but also give users an opportunity to upload and share videos of their own. However, YouTube didn’t originally start out as a website where anyone could upload any video. According to the other two founders, Hurley and Chen, YouTube was designed to originally be an online dating website. Users could upload personal videos of themselves with the hopes of finding a connection (similar to the website Hot or Not). Google purchased YouTube in 2006 for 1.65 billion dollars. The website today is now the third most visited website in the entire world, surpassing websites such as Wikipedia, Twitter, and even Yahoo.

Of course, it’s no surprise that the video sharing website has changed the lives of so many people. The website not only serves as a dumping ground for private videos to be sent to select individuals, with a specific URL, but it also has led to several huge stars and celebrities sharing public videos for the world to see. The current most subscribed member on YouTube goes by the name “PewDiePie.” PewDiePie’s real name is Felix Kjellberg. Kjellberg is a twenty-four year old from Sweden who

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has been uploading videos to the website since the year 2010. Since then, he has surpassed over thirty million subscribers, soon on his way to thirty-one million. So, the people who view some of his videos actually outnumber the viewers of certain cable television shows. Now that's quite the accomplishment! Kjellberg's "PewDiePie" net worth is now a whopping ten million dollars. Of course, another famous example of someone making it big on the website is Justin Bieber. Although I don't particularly like his music or his personality, it amazes me that he got his music career started from making and uploading YouTube videos. Justin Bieber's net worth today is estimated to be around two hundred million dollars.

Despite changing the lives of many people, YouTube's website interface has come under lots of criticism from users, myself included. The most recent of these changes of the website was promoted (forced, rather) by Google. Google required users to sign up for their social networking website, Google Plus, and merge their YouTube channels with the social network in order to continue to upload videos and comment on the website. Google Plus, of course, requires users to use their real names in order to make an account. However, the problem comes with users that are known strictly by their YouTube alias. After all, many searches done by users are either video keywords or channel names. If users are suddenly unable to locate videos, because of this sudden change, that could mean bad news for both the big YouTube channels and the website itself. This also brings up another point: what if a user doesn't want to display his/her real name due to privacy reasons? I mean, shouldn't the users have a choice? I understand Google Plus wants

to become the next Facebook, but Google shouldn't be shoving this service down its loyal users' throats. This is not how you build a website. In fact, this move by Google is so unpopular that there is actually an online petition with over 240,000 signatures to "change the YouTube comments section back to its original form." Despite the constant and overwhelming backlash, the YouTube commenting system still remains unchanged to this day. The main reason I bring up the fact that YouTube changed the system of how users comment on videos has to do with the comments themselves. Without a doubt, YouTube has perhaps the worst comments section on the Internet. When Google Plus was first introduced, a majority of YouTube creators (known as "YouTubers") were so passionately against the change that they began to disable comments altogether, or allowed users to post comments about the video to other websites such as Reddit.

As a novice filmmaker myself, I've uploaded videos of myself to the website seeking others' opinions and/or some feedback. Whenever I upload a video, I personally get ninety percent of comments on my videos either asking insulting questions, insulting other commenters, or just being overall "Internet trolls" (purposefully trying to start arguments or annoy others). It's really frustrating, because I am trying to figure out what to do differently in the editing process, acting differently, etc. because the comments are just so degrading and offensive. I've always wondered why this was such a problem on YouTube because this doesn't seem to be a huge issues on other websites (like on the aforementioned website Reddit), but I think that I understand it now. Reddit is what's known as "the front page of the Internet;" Reddit is an entertainment, social networking service

and news website where registered community members can submit content, such as text posts or direct links. Reddit uses a democratic system of “up-voting” or “down-voting” comments and posts. Reddit also has administrators that read all of the comments and delete those that are either against the websites rules or contain illegal content. YouTube, of course, has nothing even closely related to this method of sorting comments or even videos. However, I will score YouTube a point because, unlike Reddit, YouTube allows almost all types of video uploads. I’ve found it increasingly frustrating trying to advertise for my YouTube videos on Reddit, and have gotten rejected for posting information about it multiple times. According to the one of rules posted to the Reddit’s blog “nobody likes self advertisement.” YouTube at least allows me to upload whatever I want (unless if the content is copyrighted... another story for another time). Nevertheless, I still prefer Reddit’s content overall compared to YouTube’s. Yes, Google did try to improve their website platform by overhauling the comments, but the problem still remains and that is the reason why Reddit’s commenting system is still preferred.

Lastly, my biggest problem with YouTube as a novice filmmaker is the oversaturation of videos uploaded to the website. In addition, the amount of spam uploaded. In the early days of the comment section migration, Google didn’t think to add a limit to the amount of characters a person could write. Users soon caught onto this and (as if the comments weren’t bad enough already) decided to upload entire transcriptions of books. Not only that, but users could also comment links (something that they were unable to do so before

the migration). I’m sure several computers were ruined from the number of viruses downloaded from unsuspecting clickers.

YouTube’s user interface has changed dramatically since the merger that it’s become almost impossible to use and take advantage of. Directors and content creators are starting to disable the comments, or are switching websites altogether. YouTube needs to seriously reconsider their recent destructive choices. Perhaps the website designers for YouTube today should look back at how brilliant their site was before they pondered about how they could improve not YouTube, but rather how they could further shove their failing social network, Google Plus, down their users’ throats.

