

What YouTubers Tell Children

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Today's children are growing up in a digital world, surrounded by electronic devices and interacting with various media types and characters from a young age. When used conscientiously, technology and media can make many positive contributions to human life. However, if not used properly, they have the potential to lead to serious negative consequences. Learning through observation and imitation is crucial in children's learning processes. The quality of interaction with models and the models from which they learn play an important role. Today, media characters are the ones to which children are closest and interact with the most. Some children spend more time in front of screens and in media environments than they do with their parents and siblings. As a result, the content which media characters present to children and how they behave can significantly impact what children say and do. To examine the content of YouTuber videos produced for children conducted a qualitative research study using a case study design. The criterion sampling method was used to select study materials, which comprised content videos produced by ten different YouTubers. The research data were gathered using a YouTuber Video Review Form developed specifically by the researcher. To analyze the data, the thematic analysis technique was used, a type of content analysis method. The findings showed that the videos contained negative verbal expressions and visual content related to violence, aggression, slang, harmful habits, product advertisements and sexuality. Additionally, it was found that the YouTubers used verbal expressions which did not follow language rules, exhibited a unique form of expression, and used dialectal language.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's 'Electronic Village', the influence of technology, screens and media is rapidly increasing. Studies have shown that screen use begins in infancy and gradually increases with age (Duch et al., 2013). Today digital natives are born and open their eyes in an electronic village. Marc Prensky defined digital natives as people who have spent their lives engaged in technologies such as computers, video games, the internet, and mobile phones (Prensky, 2001). For most children, digital screens become a part of their daily lives. Many children learn to click, drag, zoom in and out on screens, open videos from Youtube before they learn to ride a bike or tie shoes. This shows that most of the children reach the digital world without reaching the traditional and physical milestones (Goodwin, 2018).

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's Household Information Technologies (IT) Usage Survey (2021), the rate of internet use among individuals aged from 16 to 74 increased from 42.9% in 2011 to 82.6% in 2021. The survey also revealed that the proportion of households with internet access rose from 45% in 2011 to 92% in 2021 (TÜİK, 2021). There are 4.59 billion social media users worldwide (Statista, 2022). The top three social media platforms with the most monthly active users are Facebook with 2.91 billion users, YouTube with 2.56 billion users, and WhatsApp with 2 billion users (Statista, 2022).

YouTube, one of the biggest media platforms today. YouTube was founded in February 2005 by three PayPal employees (Arthurs et. all., 2018). Today, YouTube is a major player in the contemporary media ecology (Cunningham and Silver, 2013). Children's screen usage preferences vary based on their age and developmental stage, with online video and gaming being popular in early childhood and social media dominating in later years (Common Sense Media, 2021). According to surveys by Sapsağlam (2018) and We Are Social (2021), YouTube is the most commonly used social media application among children. In one survey, children were asked which social media platform they could not live without, and YouTube ranked

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highest at 31%, followed by Snapchat at 20%, Instagram at 13%, TikTok at 13%, and Facebook at 6% (Common Sense Media, 2021).

Martinez and Olsson (2019) stated that YouTube accounts followed by children provide clues about their identities. Studies have shown that children imitate speech and communication styles and behavioral models, and tend to think and judge like their favorite YouTube characters. They are also influenced by these celebrities in their product, nutrition, shopping and toy preferences (Atalay, 2019; Corsaro, 2015; Fide & Sapsağlam, 2020; Jain et al., 2011). Early adolescents are among the fastest growing users of YouTube, and many have favorite channels or YouTubers that they follow (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019).

As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, children's screen time has increased in recent years (Common Sense Media, 2021; Rideout & Robb, 2020; Sapsağlam, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2020; TÜİK, 2021). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children aged 18-24 months should not use screens, and that those aged from two to five should have a maximum of one hour of screen time per day (AAP, 2019). Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that children under the age of one should not have sedentary screen use and that those over the age of two should have a maximum of one hour of sedentary screen time per day (WHO, 2019). Hill et al. (2016) reported that media use has limited benefits for children under the age of two.

Excessive screen time can cause a range of negative consequences in children, including obesity, depression, unhealthy eating habits, malnutrition, anxiety disorders, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sleep problems and eye health-related problems (Stiglic & Viner, 2019; Cespedes et al., 2014; Ku et al., 2019). A Canadian study found that screen use for more than two hours per day increased the likelihood of ADHD in pre-school children eightfold (Tamana et al., 2019). Lissak (2018) reported that fast screen content and excessive screen time increase the likelihood of ADHD in children and cause sleep problems.

In theories of children's development and learning processes, the most important issue is the effect of environmental factors on children's development and learning. Urie Bronfenbrenner (2006) argued that children are influenced by the ecosystems around them, Albert Bandura (1977) stated that children learn by observing the models around them and imitating them, Lev Vygotsky (1934) had previously suggested that children learn through their interactions in the social and cultural environment around them, and Ghazali (2014) argued that children had been known to learn through imitation and suggestion almost centuries before Western theorists put forward these same ideas.

Observation, imitation and suggestion are the three basic processes which are effective in children's learning. These processes gain functionality primarily from the individuals themselves and from the communication tools, situations and experiences around them (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 2006; Vygotsky, 1934). In today's world, individuals under the age of 18 are introduced to social media and have their eyes opened to a digital world at a very early age. Unlike the traditional media, the new media have given people the opportunity to produce and share their own content. They can share their own lives with the digital content which they produce and they also witness the lives of others, and this situation has revealed a phenomenon which I conceptualize as the 'effect of experiences'. In other words, people who are affected by each other's lives question their own lives and imitate the lives of others. Many studies (Dallaire, 2007; Greenfield & Marks, 2006; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Ward et al., 2014) showed that children more affected by other lives than adult.

Given that children interact intensively with media environments and media tools, the quality of media content is of great importance. What do the media environments in which children spend most of their time say to children? In order to address this question, the main purpose of this current research is to determine the quality of visual and auditory messages/items in YouTuber videos for children.

METHOD

Design

The study was designed to examine YouTuber videos which target children. A qualitative research method was chosen to enable a comprehensive analysis of the video content. Qualitative research is defined as a research method that provides in-depth analysis through data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, document analysis and field notes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). YouTuber videos with various characteristics were examined in terms of their visual and auditory content.

A case study design was chosen as the research design. Case study is defined as a research design that involves a deep analysis of a specific case, action, process or individual using data collection methods such as

observation, interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2017). The case investigated in this study was the quality of visual and auditory messages/items in YouTuber videos for children.

Study Materials

The criterion sampling method, a type of non-random sampling, was used to determine the study materials. This method involves the creation of a sample from people, events, objects or situations with the qualities determined in relation to the problem being explored (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015). The criteria considered in determining the sample were that YouTuber videos have been aimed at children in different age groups (2-18 years old), have 100 thousand or more subscribers, and receive 100 thousand or more views. Summary information about the YouTuber videos examined within the scope of the study is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary Information on YouTuber Videos.

YouTuber code	Channel subscriber count	Number of views of the examined video	Target audience	Video duration (Minute)	Video release date
Y1	4.09 million	3.2 million	Children	13:05	9 February 2018
Y2	871 thousand	117 thousand	Children	10:20	25 September 2019
Y3	647 thousand	2.7 million	Children	13:42	27 September 2020
Y4	5.14 million	5.15 million	Children	11:14	6 March 2021
Y5	1.5 million	1.34 million	Children	12:17	21 January 2020
Y6	15.7 million	8.81 million	Children	15:22	11 November 2018
Y7	214 thousand	263 thousand	Children	16:53	11 November 2018
Y8	1.3 million	939 thousand	Children	19:53	5 August 2021
Y9	10.1 million	29.3 million	Children	6:26	24 October 2016
Y10	3.48 million	371 thousand	Children	13:47	12 December 2020

The YouTuber videos analyzed in this study are summarized in Table 1. The number of subscribers to the YouTuber channels ranged from 214,000 to 15.7 million and the analyzed videos had view counts between 117,000 and 29.3 million. The video durations ranged from 6 minutes and 26 seconds to 19 minutes and 53 seconds, and the publication dates of the videos ranged from 2016 to 2021. Children were the target audience of all the videos analyzed.

Data Collection

The research data was collected using a YouTuber Video Review Form developed by the researcher. Prior to developing the form, the relevant literature was reviewed, various types of YouTuber videos were analyzed, and similar features and categories of media content were identified. A pilot study was conducted with the media content review form by analyzing five different YouTuber videos. After the pilot study, the video review form was finalized and feedback was obtained from three experts who had conducted research on the same topic. Based on the feedback from these experts, the media content review form was revised and finalized. The researcher completed the forms by analyzing the YouTuber videos individually. The review form is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. YouTuber Video Review Form

Channel YouTuber Name	Name of Watched Video	Target Audience	Number of Channel Subscribers	Number of Video Views	Video Duration (Minute)	Video Release Date
Product Advertise ment	Slang Profanity	Violence Aggression	Sexuality	Encouraging Harmful Habits		

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, a type of content analysis, was used to analyse the acquired data. Content analysis is an indirect method of examining human behavior and nature (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015). It involves identifying themes that represent the basic meanings created (Patton, 2018). The researcher recorded audio-visual messages and items in the examined videos on the video review form.

After completing the monitoring and review process, the researcher reviewed the watched media content again according to the notes and recordings to check the accuracy of the recordings. Codes for visual and audio elements in video content were determined, and these codes were grouped as themes and sub-themes.

Validity and Reliability

In scientific research, validity and reliability are crucial issues which increase the acceptability and accuracy of research results. Validity and reliability are especially important in qualitative research as there is a higher risk of researcher influence in such studies. Different methods and techniques are used to determine the validity and reliability of qualitative and quantitative research. The triangulation technique was used in the current study to increase the validity and reliability. There are four types of triangulation techniques: method triangulation, data source triangulation, analyst triangulation and theory/theory triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2018). In this study, analyst triangulation was used.

During the analyst triangulation process, another expert checked the themes and codes created during the data analysis process so that the consistency between the coders could be examined. The reliability of the data analysis was tested using the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994): Percent of Agreement = [Agreement/ (Agreement + Disagreement) X 100]. Using this formula, the percentage of agreement among the two coders was found to be 92%.

RESULTS

The YouTuber videos examined within the scope of the research are presented in figures and tables below.

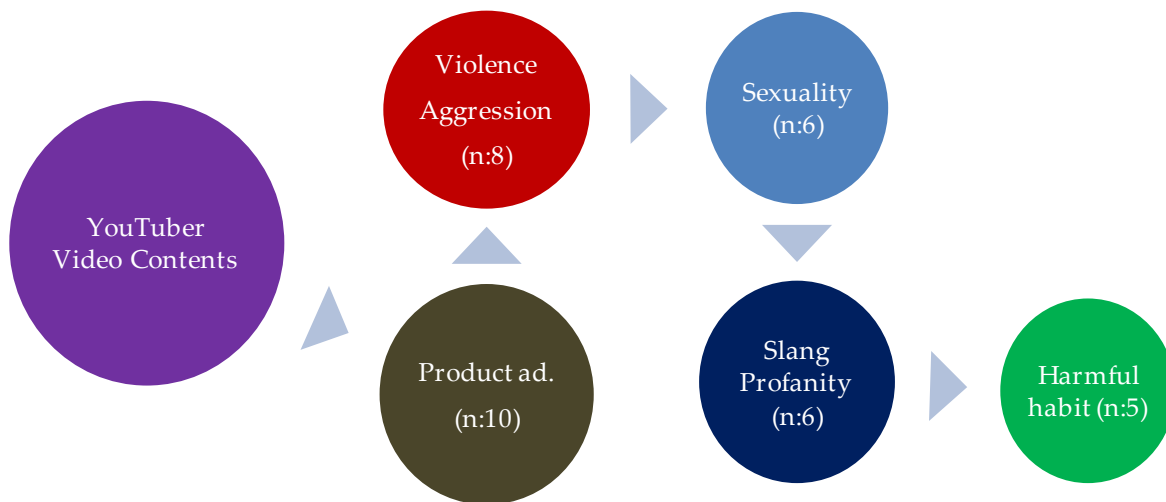


Figure 1. Themes and Sub-Themes of YouTuber Videos

Figure 1 presents the themes and sub-themes identified in the YouTuber videos which were analyzed. The videos examined included visual and audio content related to product advertisement (n:10), violence and aggression (n:8), sexuality (n:6), slang and profanity (n:6), and harmful habits (n:5). Sample codes for the themes and sub-themes in Figure 1 are provided below.

"We killed all imitators" (Y3 / Violence and aggression).

"His brother touches their butt and they laugh over and over" (Y6 / Sexuality).

"A man walks into the room with a saucepan saying 'fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck'" (Y9 / Slang and profanity).








"Dad: I also don't know how many I bought (A toy is shown in the video)" (Y10 / Product advertisement).

Table 3. Examples of Negative Verbal Content in the YouTuber Videos

YouTuber Code	Theme the Content Is Related To	Negative Verbal Content
Y3 Y5 Y8	Violence-Aggression	"Die man! / We killed all the imitators" "I broke his skull" "We will break until we reach these"
Y6 Y9	Slang-Profanity	"Hey/Oi" (Lan! in Turkish) "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck"
Y4 Y7	Harmful Habit	"Great choice" (for a makeup product) "You applied the nail polish perfectly" (The nail polished child is 3 years old).
Y4 Y10	Product Advertisement	"I don't even know how many I bought" "I want all of them"
Y6 Y9	Sexuality	"Touching the butt and laughing" "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck"

The findings in Table 3, which indicate negative verbal content in YouTuber videos, show that YouTubers frequently use negative verbal expressions related to violence-aggression, slang-profanity, harmful habits, product advertisement, and sexuality. Additionally, negative verbal expressions related to violence and aggression can be seen in almost all videos to varying degrees. It was also observed that YouTubers do not comply with grammar rules in their verbal expressions and exhibit a unique expression style. Furthermore, YouTubers use a dialect when speaking.

Table 4. Examples of Negative Visual Content in YouTuber Videos

YouTuber Kodu	Theme the Content Is Related To	Negative Visual Content
Y2 Y5	Violence-Aggression (Attack with a gun) ("Die" is written on the doll's face)	 
Y4 Y7	Harmful Habit (Child does makeup with a bag of makeup.)	 
Y2 Y9	Sexuality (The character in the video is only shown in underwear). (Two 'Spiderman's are shown in a sex position)	 
Y4 Y10	Product Advertisement (A toy makeup kit of a known brand is being advertised)	

(A toy train of a known brand is being advertised)



The findings showing the negative visual content in YouTuber videos, presented in Table 4, demonstrate that negative visual content related to violence-aggression, profanity, harmful habits, product advertisement, and sexuality was present in the YouTuber videos, and almost all of the videos contained negative visual content related to violence-aggression to varying degrees. The visual content in the videos included slapping, applying makeup on a three-year-old child, male-male sexuality, torture and excessive product placement. Some of the visual content in the examined videos contained images which are too negative to be shared here. It was observed that the visual content in the videos was not suitable for the psycho-social and moral development of children.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

This qualitative case study analysed YouTuber video content aimed at children. The phenomenon under investigation was the nature of the visual and auditory messages/elements in YouTuber videos for children. The research data were obtained through a YouTuber Video Analysis Form developed specifically for the study by the researcher. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the acquired data.

It was found that YouTuber channel subscribers ranged from 214,000 to 15.7 million, and the videos analysed in the study had between 117,000 and 29.3 million views. YouTube is the most popular and most frequently used social media application among children. According to Sapsağlam (2018), even three-year-old children are familiar with the YouTube application. In another study, children were asked, 'If you had to choose a site that you couldn't live without, which one would it be?' They responded with YouTube (31%), Snapchat (20%), Instagram (13%), Tiktok (13%) and Facebook (6%) (Common Sense Media, 2021). Research has shown that YouTuber channels are intensely followed by children. Some of the channels producing content for children in Turkey have subscriber and video viewing numbers as follows: Beter Böcük (20.5 million subscribers, 11.74 billion views), Sevimli Dostlar (7.88 million subscribers, 8.06 billion views), Sesegel Çocuk (3.29 million subscribers, 3.04 billion views) and Prenses Lina Tv (3.26 million subscribers, 3.22 billion views) (Socialblade, 2023).

The videos examined in this study showed that YouTubers frequently use negative verbal expressions related to violence, aggression, profanity, harmful habits, product advertising and sexuality. Furthermore, it was observed that the verbal expressions of YouTubers were not grammatically correct and they exhibited a unique style of expression, using colloquial language and dialects. Papadamou et al. (2019) classified videos containing sexual innuendos, obscene or harassing language, nudity, child abuse, screaming and terrifying sound effects, frightening scenes or characters as disturbing YouTube videos. Children begin to acquire language and speech skills from an early age, and the quality and content of the interactions which they experience during this process are crucial. Studies have shown that increased exposure to screens in children is associated with delayed language development and expressive language development problems (AAP, 2017; Westby, 2018). Kahveci (2021) showed that videos on YouTuber channels which children watch frequently include foul language and profanity. Ferreira Deslandes et al. (2021) found that YouTuber videos contain excessive use of profanity and vulgar language and that the dominant speech and writing style is riddled with grammatical errors. Toksoy (2021) reported that YouTube broadcasters have an impact on children's language development and speech habits, and that the words and combinations of words used by YouTube broadcasters are remembered and used by children in daily life. Another negative effect of exposure to YouTuber videos for children is the constant product advertisements which encourage them to consume. Commercial companies which discover children's purchasing power constantly increase their digital advertising targeted at children. According to a report published by Statista (2021), digital advertising spending targeting children increased from \$600 million in 2016 to \$1.7 billion in 2021.

During the study, it was observed that the YouTube videos examined contained negative visual contents such as violence-aggression, profanity, harmful habits, product advertisement and sexuality. The videos contained visual contents such as slapping, putting makeup on a three-year-old child, male-to-male sexuality, torture

and abundant product advertisements. The visual contents in these videos were found to be inappropriate for children's psycho-social and moral development. Fide and Sapsaglam (2020) found that YouTube videos encourage children to consume, reduce their productivity and dull their play skills. Castello-Martinez and Tur-Vines (2020) stated that new media applications and social media platforms target children and that YouTube videos frequently contain product advertisements and advertisements for harmful foods, with very limited warnings or informative content directed towards children. Children's exposure to violence and aggression in media environments poses a serious risk of transmitting violence to daily life and the streets. In a study involving participants from Australia, China, Croatia, Germany, Japan, Romania and the US, the relationship between aggressive behavior and media usage habits was examined and it was found that exposure to violent screen media increased aggressive tendencies (Anderson et al., 2017). According to the results of a study examining whether violent cartoon films lead to an increase in aggressive thinking and behavior among Chinese children (n=3000), short-term exposure to violent cartoon films was found to trigger aggressive thoughts and behaviors more than non-violent cartoon films (Zhang et al., 2019). In another study conducted with 222 mothers who had children aged between three and ten in Lebanon, it was seen that violence and other negative behaviors frequently occurred in cartoon films and that there was a strong connection between aggressive behaviors watched in cartoon films and children's tendencies towards violence (Beaino, 2021).

Another important finding of the current study was the presence of verbal and visual contents related to sexuality in YouTube videos. Studies have shown that there is a lot of sexual content in different media environments and that children exposed to sexual content tend to engage in sexual activity at an earlier age (Collins et al., 2017). A study examining 135 research articles published between 1995 and 2015 found that regular exposure to sexual content in the media leads to body dissatisfaction, seeing oneself as a sexual object, and other negative beliefs and attitudes (Ward, 2016). A study showed that 20% of teenagers send or receive sexually explicit images by a cell phone or the internet (NCPTU, 2008). Another important finding in the YouTube videos examined in the study was the presence of verbal and visual contents that encourage harmful habits. Stoddard et al. (2012) stated that seeing photographs of people using alcohol or drugs on social media is a risk factor, especially for alcohol use. Nwafor et al. (2022) studied 400 participants and reported that social media, with their interactive features, encourage young people to use illegal drugs and other substances, and that as part of this process, celebrities and advertisements in media contents are influential. Morgan et al. (2010) found that 75% of young people reported that they had seen a friend's photo posted by another friend who was drinking alcohol, 30% reported that a friend shared a photo of them drinking, and 26% reported that they themselves had shared a photo of them drinking.

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, individuals under the age of 18 are considered to be children and have basic rights such as the right to life, development, protection and participation (Unicef, 2022). According to the convention, children must be protected from all kinds of maltreatment, neglect, abuse and harmful habits. Media platforms such as YouTube pose serious risks for the exploitation and privacy of children. In fact, in 2019, Google and YouTube were forced to pay a \$170 million settlement to the Federal Trade Commission because of allegations of illegally collecting personal information from children without parental consent (Federal Trade Commission, 2019).

Media environments offer many opportunities for children's growth, development and learning, but also carry significant risks. Aslan et al. (2019) found that children's media literacy skills were low in a study involving 1500 children. Gündüz Kalan (2010) stated that parents' guide their children in selecting programs but that they do not have sufficient awareness of children's media literacy. Considering that children and parents have insufficient media literacy levels, it becomes clear that children are quite vulnerable to the possible risks of media environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS and LIMITATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations can be made:

- Parents should educate their children about both beneficial and harmful content.
- Parents should support the development of self-regulation skills in their children.
- Parents should monitor their children's digital footprint.
- Reasonable rules and limits on screen time should be established for children.
- Researchers should investigate the effects of screen time on children.

- Researchers should investigate the effects of media content on children.
- Media and digital literacy skills should be supported for all individuals.
- Supervision and control mechanisms regarding media content for children should be strengthened.

This study examined YouTuber videos which targeted children. The study was limited to ten YouTuber videos, so future research could investigate children's and parents' views about YouTuber videos and media content. The research did not include findings about factors which lead children to follow YouTubers. It is important to know the reasons why children follow YouTubers and this is another suggested direction for future studies. This study employed a qualitative methodology and did not examine how YouTuber videos affect children. Future research could therefore be enriched with quantitative data and longitudinal studies could investigate the effects of the YouTuber videos on children's development over time.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that they have no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethics Approval

We conducted the study in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration in 1975.

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Research and Publication Ethics Statement

Hereby, we as the authors consciously assure that for the manuscript "What YouTubers tell children" the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The work has a single author.

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