
In What Way Is the Rhetoric Used in YouTube Videos Altering the Perception of the LGBTQ+ Community for Both Its Members and Non-Members?

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Introduction

The LGBTQ community has become a much more prevalent part of today's society. Over the past several years, the LGBTQ community has been recognized more equally in comparison to other groups in society. June 2015 was a huge turning point for the community due to the legalization of same sex marriage. The legalization of same sex marriage in June 2015 had a great impact on the LGBTQ community, as well as non-members. With an increase in new media platforms like YouTube, content on the LGBTQ community has become more accessible and more prevalent than decades ago. LGBTQ media has been represented in movies, television shows, short videos, and even books. The exposure of LGBTQ characters in a popular 2000s sitcom called *Will & Grace* paved the way for LGBTQ representation in media. A study conducted by Edward Schiappa and others concluded that exposure to LGBTQ communities through TV helped educate Americans, therefore reducing sexual prejudice. Unfortunately, the way the LGBTQ community is portrayed through online media such as YouTube has an effect on LGBTQ members and non-members, and it has yet to be studied. Most "young people's experiences are affected by the present context characterized by the rapidly increasing prevalence of new (online) media" because of their exposure to several media outlets (McInroy and Craig 32). This gap has led to the research question does the LGBTQ representation on YouTube negatively or positively represent this community to its members, and in what way is the community impacted by this representation as well as non-members?

One positive way the LGBTQ community was represented through media was on the popular TV show *Will & Grace*. Initially, the show was created as a romantic comedy, but it had a greater impact than just making people laugh. According to Edward Schiappa, "[F]or those viewers with the fewest direct gay contacts, exposure to *Will & Grace* appears to have the strongest potential influence on reducing sexual prejudice" (qtd. in Borden). The show exposed gay characters to the world, which altered views on the LGBTQ community. Even though people may

not directly know a person in the community, the show has educated them from 1998 to 2006. After 11 long years the show returned and aired again on September 28 2017 on NBC.

YouTube hit the internet in 2005. Since then it has become “the world’s most popular online video site, with users watching 4 billion hours’ worth of video each month and uploading 72 hours’ worth of video every minute” (Dickey). YouTube contains a wide range of videos ranging from DIYs, day in the life, book and movie reviews, and even how to come out to your parents. YouTube is much more than a streaming video site; it is a community made up of YouTubers (who create the content) and the viewers. Over the past several years, YouTube has been an outlet for LGBTQ youth and adults. Whether it’s posting or watching, most people have been exposed to LGBTQ stories and experiences through YouTube. This leads to the question how has the growing LGBTQ content on YouTube altered the perceptions of the LGBTQ members and its non-members as a whole?

Over the past several years, YouTube has been an outlet for LGBTQ youth and adults.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to depict the impact of YouTube videos on both LGBTQ young people and non-LGBTQ members. This paper focuses on how their perceptions of the community as a whole have been altered by their exposure to different online videos, and how it makes them feel. This study aims to explore:

1. The way the LGBTQ community is portrayed on YouTube (positively or negatively).
2. The way the LGBTQ youth is impacted by the representation YouTube displays.
3. The way non-LGBTQ members perceptions are altered by the increasing exposure to the LGBTQ community through several media platforms from the sharing of YouTube videos.

Participants

I focused on 37 students at the University of Central Florida as part of this study. I have chosen UCF because of its large class size, diverse population and proximity. More specifically, the students are in UCF’s Pride Student Association.

Context

The University of Central Florida has a large university enrollment, “with more than 66,000 students,” making it one of the largest universities in the nation (*UCF.edu*). UCF has a large, diverse population of students from all over the state of Florida and the world. Each student comes from a different background and has a different mindset on the LGBTQ community, whether they are a part of the community or not.

Method

To help answer my research question I specifically surveyed students in UCF’s Pride Student Association (PSA). To collect data, I created an online survey through SurveyMonkey and issued it through the PSA and Pride Commons for an inside look at what ways LGBTQ’s perceptions are affected by the representation in videos on YouTube. To also reach non-LGBTQ members, I issued my survey through the dorm communities on UCF’s campus. Issuing surveys gave me a better understanding on the perception members and non-members have of the LGBTQ community.

The Survey

The survey consisted of 10 questions on surveymonkey.com. This survey included questions about gender, age, and whether participants identify within the LGBTQ community. Next the survey asked how familiar the individuals are with the online video streaming site, YouTube. Along with how often they use YouTube ranging from 0 (I don't use) to 100 (hours spent on YouTube). The next question asked respondents whether they have ever heard of or watched certain YouTubers all identifying within the LGBTQ community, and this question allowed participants to check all that's applied. The following question asked responders if they watch LGBTQ YouTubers then why they do it; some examples would be a sense of community, entertainment purposes, and for comedic relief. To evaluate the way participants views were altered by LGBTQ content on YouTube, I asked them to respond to a short answer question specifying in what ways their views were altered.

Results

All 37 respondents received the same set of 10 survey questions. Below I analyzed the participants' answers and the 13 short answer responses that were provided.

Of the 37 participants, 29 of them were female and 7 were male. One participant identified as non-binary, which is neither male nor female. From the 37 respondents, 24 identified within the LGBTQ community and 13 did not. This information is relevant because my survey covered multiple gender identities along with people inside and outside the LGBTQ community (see Appendix A)

Every participant that took my survey is familiar with YouTube. However, the lowest a participant rated their familiarity with YouTube was an 8 out of 100, but the average number was 86. Although every participant was familiar with YouTube not everyone used it. From 0-100, scores ranged from as low as 13-17 and as high as 100, making the average YouTube usage number a lot smaller, averaging in at 67 out of 100. This data is relevant to the research topic because everyone that took my survey has heard of or used YouTube, which allows them to possibly be exposed to LGBTQ media on the site.

LGBTQ Media

After asking participants their familiarity and usage of YouTube I then asked, "Have you heard of/watch any of the following YouTubers?" allowing participants to check as many that applied. The list of YouTubers I provided on the survey all identified within the LGBTQ community, ranging from gay to transgender and all in-between. Only 4 respondents indicated that they had never heard of or watched any YouTubers from this list. Surprisingly enough, 2 out of these 4 respondents were a part of the LGBTQ community, but had never heard of or watched the people listed. This was due to the amount of time they spend on YouTube. The other 33 respondents indicated that they had all heard of or watched one or more LGBTQ YouTubers from the list provided. This data is relevant because most of the participants have been exposed to LGBTQ media on YouTube (see Appendix B)

The next question in my survey asked, "If you watch these YouTubers, why do you watch them?" This question can be answered for members and non-members of the LGBTQ community, allowing participants to check all boxes that applied. The most popular answer I received was 62% of people watch videos made by LGBTQ YouTubers for entertainment purposes. Seven of these people were not a part of the LGBTQ community, yet viewed these videos for their own entertainment purposes. Additionally, 46% of participants indicated they watched these YouTubers for comedic relief. Meanwhile, 34% indicated they watch these YouTubers because they are interested in their lives. And because listening to their life stories and everyday struggles with

being in the LGBTQ community provides them with a sense of community. (see Appendix C)

Not too long-ago YouTube updated their “Safety Mode”, even giving it a new name, “Restricted Mode.” The purpose of this mode is to hide “potentially inappropriate” content, and it is designed to be used by parents and schools. However, most LGBTQ videos are often blocked by restricted mode. In regards to access to LGBT content on YouTube, one specific respondent (number 26) said, “Although the media, such as television, is starting to use more LGBTQ+ characters, they really do not get as much screen time or as well-thought-out

storylines. YouTube, on the other hand, appeals to all types of people and has become a safe place for the community to be themselves and learn more about who they are.” This person believes LGBTQ rhetoric in YouTube videos is used in such a way where struggling youth can find a safe community within YouTube, along with learning to accept themselves and learn more about who they are as a person.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how the LGBTQ community is portrayed on YouTube. After surveying a total of 37 respondents, their answers to the question, “How do LGBTQ videos on YouTube make you feel?” were all positive. The choices listed and results to the question were 59% a sense of belonging, 76% content/happy, 0% uncomfortable, 0% uneasy, 41% better connected with yourself, 65% more educated, and one person (respondent 24) put ‘other’ saying that they felt, “Just content people use their platform [YouTube] to spread their opinions on.” This data surprised me because of my preexisting beliefs. Before conducting my survey, I would have never thought that all answers to this question would be positive. Due to the influx of hateful comments left on

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LGBTQ YouTubers’ videos, I thought that at least a small percentage would have voted differently. After analyzing the data I collected from this survey, it made me feel a little more relieved that in today’s society LGBTQ media on YouTube makes people (speaking from my survey results) feel more educated, therefore hopefully helping to reduce sexual prejudice (see Appendix D).

One respondent (number 36), who is not a member of the LGBTQ community, had this to say, “It allowed me to see different perspectives and get a first-hand look on what it’s like to walk in the shoes of someone in the LGBTQ community. Someone who may not know anyone within the community is able to better understand it due to YouTubers exposing their personal life and beliefs.” Rhetoric used by LGBTQ YouTubers can also alter non-members’ perceptions of the community by making people aware of their struggles and life stories—such as, for example, the experience of coming out—therefore leading them to become more educated on the community.

This study aimed to explore how LGBTQ youth are impacted by the representation on YouTube. One respondent (number 4) stated, “It made me have a more positive outlook on it and it gave me a sense of community, especially when I was feeling alone while figuring out my sexuality. It also gave me people to connect with and people who understood a part of who I am.” This research showed that LGBTQ rhetoric in YouTube videos is used in such a way where struggling youth can find a safe community within YouTube, along with learning to accept themselves, to learn more about who they are as a person and connect with others that feel the same way. Overall, the data collected in this studied showed a positive way in which the LGBTQ community is represented and perceived on YouTube for members and non-members.

Works Cited

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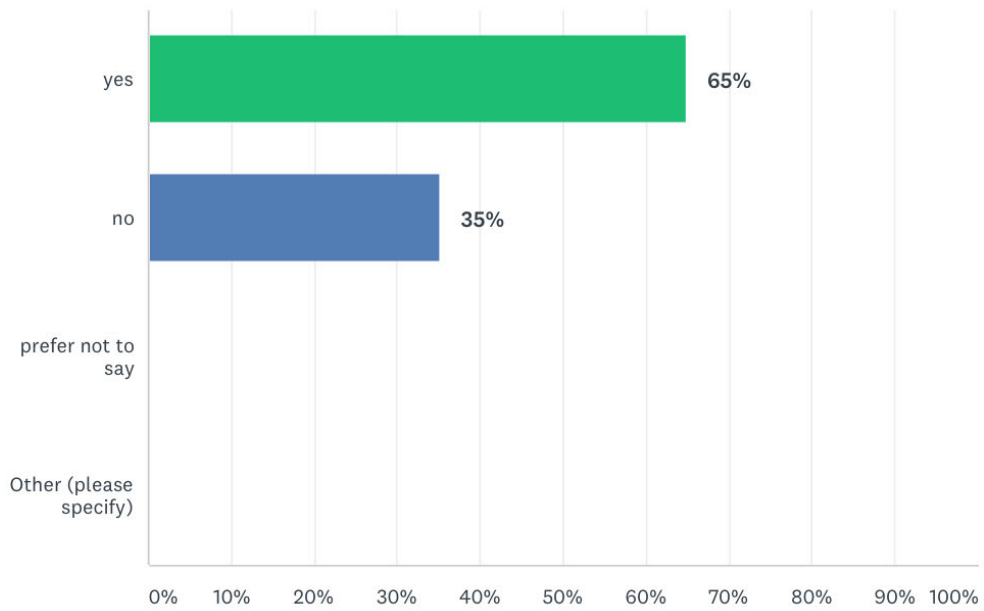
Natalie Maurer

Natalie Maurer is a sophomore at the Rosen College of Hospitality Management with a major in Entertainment Management and a minor in Film. She is involved in the UCF Campus Activities Board as the social chair, in the concerts committee. Natalie is to expect to graduate a year early. Upon graduating, she hopes to move to Nashville to pursue her dream of working alongside various artists and musicians.

APPENDIX A: Participants that Identified within the LGBTQ Community

Do you identify yourself within the LGBTQ Community?

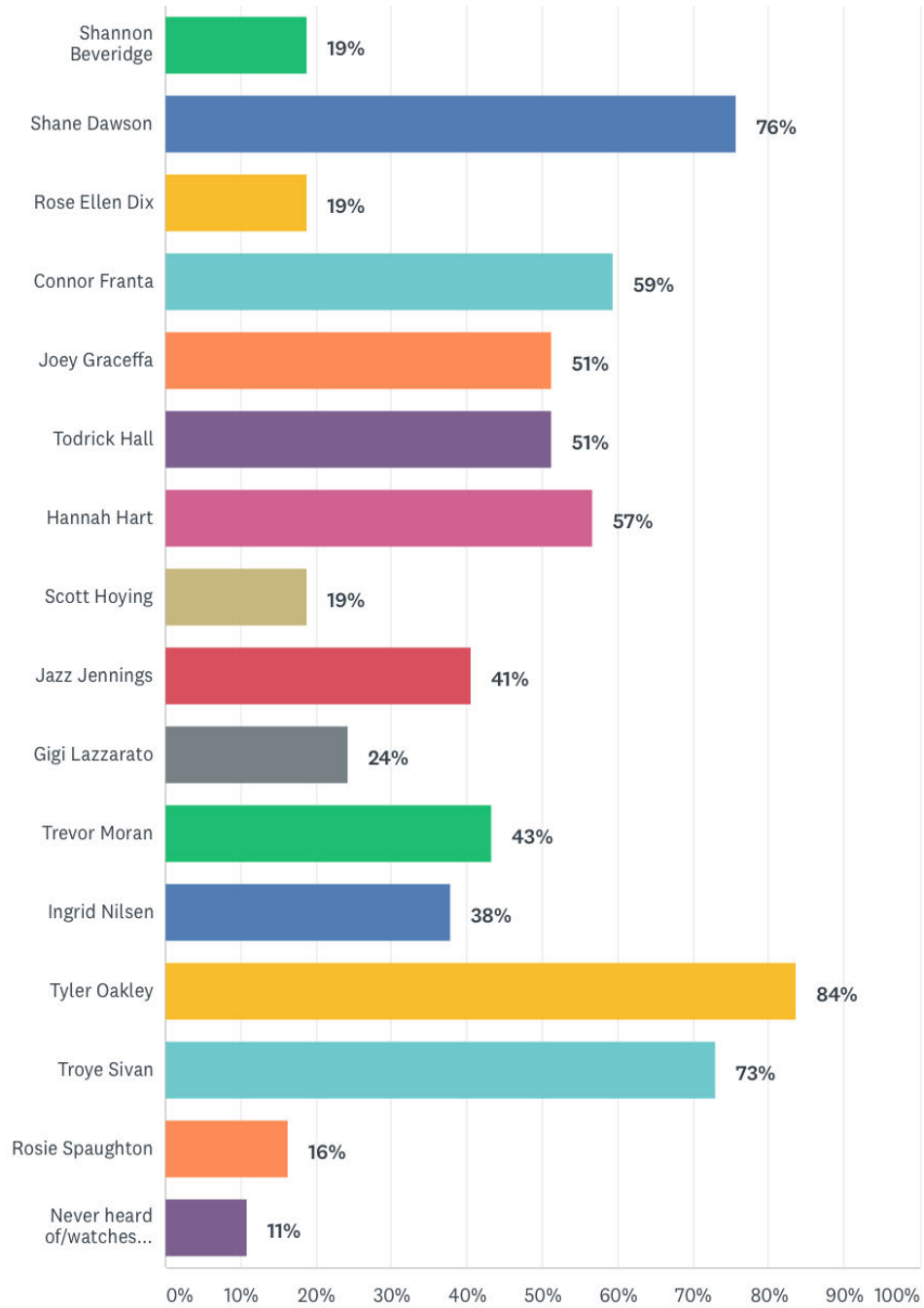
Answered: 37 Skipped: 0



APPENDIX B: How Familiar Participants Were with LGBTQ YouTubers

Have you heard of/watch any of the following Youtubers?

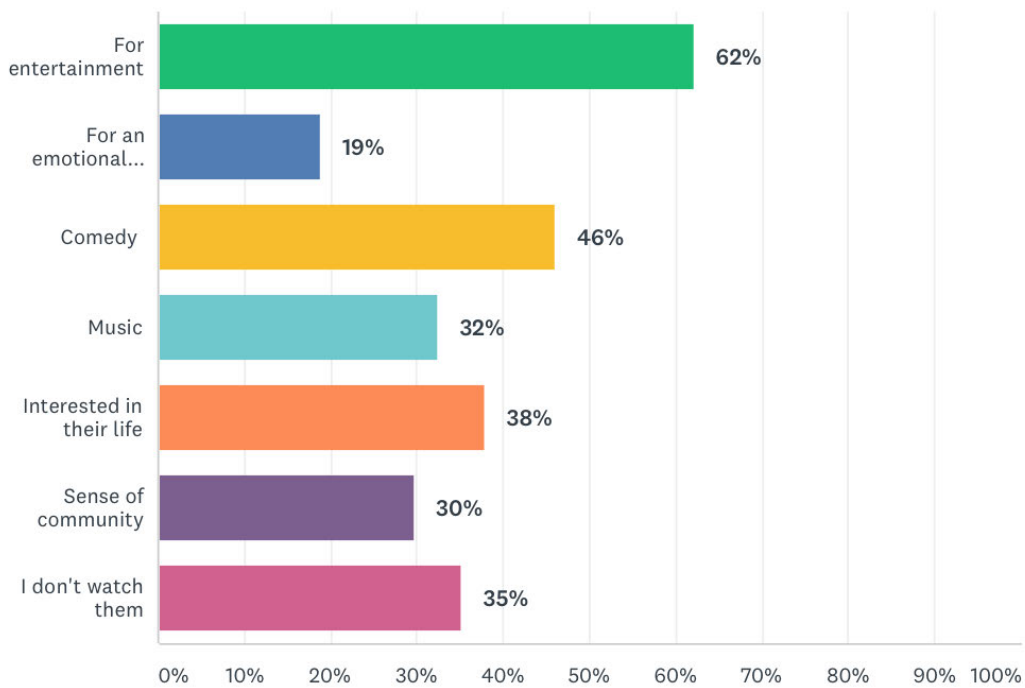
Answered: 37 Skipped: 0



APPENDIX C: Why Participants Watched Videos Made by LGBTQ YouTubers

If you watch these YouTubers, why do you watch them?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 0



APPENDIX D: How Participants Felt about LGBTQ Videos on YouTube

How do LGBTQ videos on YouTube make you feel?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 0

