From vernacularized commercialism to kidbait: toy review videos on YouTube and the problematics of the mash-up genre

# Details

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## Topics

* Social mediation
* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Literacy and skills
* Digital and socio-cultural environment

## Sample

"35 toy review channels including 29,037 individual videos. A subset of 180 toy review videos from the 35 content producing channels were subjected to close-reading and analyzed with regard to the actors appearing in the videos (narrator) and the activities completed while conducting the review (method). In addition, the rhetorical strategies used by narrators when making an evaluation or an assessment were identified." (Author, 243-244)

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support
* Other

## Other Parent Implication

Children’s voices and agency

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Enable and enforce ethical principle adherence in toy review production; Adult gatekeepers need support and tools for developing literacy for online genres

## Implications For Stakeholders About

* Researchers
* Industry
* Other

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Ethical principles of toy review production; Adult gatekeepers need support and tools for developing literacy for online genres

# Abstract

Children’s entertainment has grown massively on YouTube in recent years, and the channels with the most subscriptions and views host content designed for children. This article investigates the toy review genre as present in YouTube videos targeting children. This topic has been discussed previously, most notably in regard to digital parenting and child infringement scandals. This analysis aims to more deeply understand the forms and functions of toy reviews in the contexts of YouTube’s political economy, branding and commercialization, as well as regulation. We analyzed the narrative strategies of 180 videos across 35 toy review channels in order to gain an emic understanding of reviewing. Besides producing repetitive content characterized as “kidbait,” these channels also employ creative aims and strategies to convince adults of the benefits of watching. Toy reviews are, however, a complex hybrid genre mediating children’s commodities and play culture, and more attention should be dedicated to the ethical principles of their production.

# Outcome

"As 'branded produsage' or 'branded prosumption,' toy review videos are an extreme type of vernacular reviewing. A qualitative analysis showed that toy review channels use 'reviewing' as a strategy to expose toys and other playful consumer products to their audiences, often embedded in other online strategies of play and entertainment. Even if motivated by educational, narrative, or dramaturgical factors, such intent is strongly intermingled with marketing and influencing, reinforcing popular brands. The lay, professional, or (semi-)professional content producers more or less consciously become promotional intermediaries who are only voluntarily bound by any ethical rules of conduct concerning their sponsorship and production principles.... Toy reviewing also involves a great deal of potential for addressing toys, play, and children’s worlds in a way that supports children’s voices and agency." (Author, 251)