

# Study of 'Don't Hug Me I'm Scared' Web Series Storytelling for IP Design Regarding Safe Viewing Content for Children

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## ABSTRACT

In 2022 the internet was getting more advanced, and every age can use it. For a long time, the mass media has become a tool used in children's socialization. The easiest way to teach children is via the internet, specifically through child-friendly shows. The shows are usually educational, such as learning about colors, letters, numbers, social teachings, etc. They can imitate or learn the teachings they watch in everyday life. This children's content has positive and negative impacts, but one of the problems is the delivery of indecent content such as violence, pornography, or wrong teachings inserted into the spectacle. Apart from problems with YouTube's algorithm, irresponsible adults make children who watch it participate in acts of violence or are traumatized by watching it. This does not mean that all children's viewing of content is terrible, but that there needs to be discretion and initiative on the part of parents. This case could create a big scandal in the internet world. This research aims to dissect and analyze a well-known web series on YouTube, 'Don't Hug Me I'm Scared' by Joseph Pelling, Baker Terry, and Rebecca Sloan, in terms of storytelling and create an Intellectual Property (IP) to create safe content for children. One of the theories circulating about this animation is the problem of children's content being deviated due to the actions of adults and their criticism, making this series suitable as the main foundation for research.

**Keywords:** mass media, internet, content, children.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2022, everyone uses the internet in their daily lives, and people now easily believe information circulating on the internet without checking the authenticity of the information they receive. From children, teenagers, and adults, to the elderly, internet use is part of life. From the past until now, there are always various kinds of shows for children on television and the internet. Usually, the performances are educational, such as learning about colors, letters, numbers, social teachings, etc. Packaging forms also vary; some are in 2D, 3D animation, dolls (for example, Sesame Street), or mixed (for example, Blue's Clues). Initially, this children's content had a positive impact, but over time, children's range was used for bad things or inserted inappropriate adult scenes (Bridle, 2018).

Children are easily influenced by what they see, partly because of the socialization they receive. According to Light, Keller, and Calhoun (1989), the mass media is a socialization agent that influences imaginary behavior. Messages broadcast through electronic media can direct their imaginations toward prosocial and antisocial behavior. The showing of various violent or indecent scenes can change the behavior of morality and moral violations in society. The mass media is often used to measure, shape, or influence public opinion. The impact of the mass media as an agent of socialization has yet to be discovered with certainty. Still, this view is also accepted by the Association for Natural Psychology, an American psychological association.

The thing mentioned earlier is a phenomenon that is also common in Indonesia. Watching content specifically for children that contains adult scenes on television or the internet can influence children's behavior and ways of thinking. Parents also need to realize that not all content that children watch is

safe. Of course, the mass media can be a good or bad 'teacher' for children, so it requires policy in choosing content. From this case, the author decided to create intellectual property (IP) to design safe children's content through a case study of the storytelling of the web series "Don't Hug Me, I'm Scared." The primary purpose of establishing this IP is present safe content specifically for children that is safe, especially in the story aspect. Based on the description of the background presented, there are several problems that can be examined as a reference. First, how can you tell stories that are both educational and entertaining for children? Second, how to monetize research results in the form of story content.

## **METHODS**

This research will be conducted using qualitative research methods. Data and research results will be in documents, descriptions, and theories. This study will focus on analyzing and interpreting written materials based on their context. There will be written materials in the form of books, articles, and so on. The data will help the author understand the message in the web series and make it the primary foundation for making IP. Observation and analysis of animated web series, as well as field facts. From this step, it will be easier to link fictional stories that allude to the condition of children's content that is starting to break down and its relation to the condition of today's children whose entertainment is animations from social media such as YouTube.

## **RESULTS**

### **Interview Result**

From interviews with various youths and adults, and as represented by Christel Zefanya as a guest speaker, there are conclusions that can be drawn: (1) Young people and adults who are responsible for looking after small children, let children watch animated content, only they watch carefully; (2) So far, fortunately, they haven't found any weird content in YouTube's algorithm either. Among them, there are those who show more animation on TV because it is safer.

From the interviews with the children, represented by Joy and Chella as two sources, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) They usually use YouTube to watch the animation, among other content; (2) Their parents supervise their viewing and teach them how to choose good viewing content; (3) They have been inculcated to be careful with what they watch, and immediately close videos as soon as they come across obscene content or bad teaching (there is an assumption that they have encountered videos on par with Elsagate because one source said he came across animations that made for adults).

### **Final Observation**

The author has made observations so far to find out the children's content that is displayed in the algorithm and the animations children watch in public places. This process starts from October to February 2023. At the start of 2023, the controversy over the 'Elsagate' subgenre on YouTube surfaced again. The animations show adult content wrapped in well-known characters on the internet. According to the comments of several content creators, these animations want to indoctrinate children in the wrong way for profit and money. The more viewers, the creators are not responsible for profit. Fortunately, the algorithm is much better, and the search keys are more restricted. So far, the writer pays attention to what children watch in public places (predominantly in places to eat) are animations such as Cocomelon or nursery rhymes from several good channels. One of the interviewees was caught watching the animation from the game Friday Night Funkin' but the video is still relatively safe, even though the game is not for young children.

## Study Results of Web Series Storytelling 'Don't Hug Me I'm Scared' for IP Design About Safe Viewing Content for Children

### Storytelling Study

Using stories in the way of telling stories, according to Disney, it can be applied directly. The issues we want to raise in this web series are still related to today's life. Although many theories can be taken (because of the freedom to think creatively), one of the main problems that are often interpreted is children's content inserted with various teachings that are not true or distorted. If we follow the rules of the storyline:

- 1) **Introduction to the world:** The world picture works, or introduces the world to the audience.
- 2) **Character introduction:** The characters that appear in the story, and the uniqueness of each that you want to highlight. This step is used, so the audience is emotionally involved in the story.
- 3) **Problems in the story:** Highlight problems and emotions that are the key to getting into the minds and hearts of the target audience. The issue at hand is relevant.
- 4) **Solution:** Ups and downs from the character's condition, and there is development over time. Problems and solutions are also resolved.

When the formula is further elaborated, there are several points that can be taken to strengthen it. The messages that Disney wants to teach the audience are also through the style of storytelling:

- 1) Use it as a lesson when you fall into that problem.
- 2) When you pass it, it becomes new knowledge to face new challenges.
- 3) Having friends who accompany you is necessary because the challenge is challenging.
- 4) Assumptions and challenges from the main character, how he faces his challenges, and how he changes his steps to face problems.
- 5) Not all problems have to be solved on that very day. There is time to step back and improve the way. It's better to step back and evaluate yourself.
- 6) Each character has its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore they can complement each other.
- 7) Learn from mistakes and falls.
- 8) The steps taken are not a smooth road, so always be careful and on guard.
- 9) Focus on the problems you want to face, don't let anything become a distraction.
- 10) Face problems well and with strength because getting the result requires sacrifice.
- 11) There can only be an adventure if you have something to overcome.

If it is applied to the web series and its analysis, and if it is dissected by points, it can be seen as follows:

- 1) The protagonists in the web series are Yellow Guy, Red, and Bird. The antagonists are Roy the father of the Yellow Guy and self-styled teachers. The three of them live in a world of felt- or studio stage.
- 2) The main problem that the three of them face is teachers who cannot be held accountable for their teachings and go astray. The main victim is Yellow Guy as a curious child.
- 3) The teachers have so much power that they can control their stage.
- 4) Red berhasil lepas dari guru-guru itu karena sudah mengetahui kebenarannya, tetapi gagal menyelamatkan Yellow Guy dan Bird. Red berusaha menghubungi kedua temannya yang masih terpengaruhi oleh para guru, tetapi yang ada Bird mati karena dibungkam dan ditumbalkan. Roy selau figur orang tua yang memiliki anak justru tidak melakukan apapun untuk menyelamatkan putranya.
- 5) Red manages to escape the teachers knowing the truth but fails to save Yellow Guy and Bird. Red tries to contact his two friends, who are still under the influence of the teachers, but only

Bird dies from being silenced and sacrificed. Roy, as a parent figure who has children, does nothing to save his son.

- 6) Red is now in the boring adult world, and when he expresses his ideas and creativity, Red's clones (other adults) find his ideas very boring and ugly. Precisely at that moment, he met Roy.
- 7) It turns out that Red's abilities can be manipulated, and it turns out that his actions traumatized Yellow Guy because he lost Red and Bird, while he was still trapped in the world of felt. Red doesn't rest until he flips the switch on the manipulation machine.
- 8) Their world is back to normal but simpler. Even though they now find the world simple, they return to zero without suffering. However, they have new challenges, as if they are not yet free from the vicious circle.

From this analysis, apart from this story being still relevant and following Disney's way of telling it (with a bit of extreme spice), the problem can be focused. Various theories can be created from one story, and they are free to be interpreted. This can be seen from the opening song of episode 1, which teaches creative thinking, and episode 6 is closed with the same theme. Only one theory is analyzed because of the problems related to the real world, especially those with long experience with children.

### *Brainstorming*

The writer thought of several ideas from the foundation of the web series 'Don't Hug Me I'm Scared' and tried to create a new story. The story is not far from the original story, but still has an original side without relying too much on the original.

### *Character Design*

According to observations, the authors found several references that could help. Today's children like to see interesting and striking (albeit simple) character designs, for example Boyfriend and Girlfriend from the game Friday Night Funkin, Poppy and Huggy Wuggy from the game Poppy Playtime, or some character designs from the game Roblox. But because their designs are widely known and to avoid plagiarism, the authors use other character designs as references.

### *World Building*

Different from the original story, the references used are from outside. Still, the foundation is 'Don't Hug Me I'm Scared', but because the writer doesn't use stop motion and puppets because they've been used in old projects. The author tries a different, and simpler, approach.



**Figure 1.** The character design.

## CONCLUSION

In 2022 the internet was getting more advanced, and every age can use it. For a long time, the mass media has become a tool used in children's socialization. The easiest way to teach children now is through kid-friendly shows. Shows are usually educational. With the teachings they watch in everyday life. This children's content has positive and negative impacts. Still, one of the problems is the delivery of obscene content such as violence, pornography, or false teachings inserted into the show. Therefore, the writer decided to examine this problem with the help of the animation 'Don't Hug Me I'm Scared'. From this animation, the author got the theory that 'Don't Hug Me I'm Scared' is a form of allusion to unfriendly children's viewing content, whether it was before the time of animation production until now in 2023. This animation was created by two art students who originally wanted to assess the concept of creative thinking, and it is still relevant today. With the help of observations and interviews, the writer concluded that animations under the controversial subgenre 'Elsagate' are accurate and that adults are also helping children supervise their viewing. Due to the mutually supportive analysis and field facts, the authors created a new IP. The author hopes this IP can drown irresponsible content creators and make excellent and safe children's content. Not only for children, but it can also encourage parents to take care of their children in the digital world. Parents are also expected to teach their children how to sort child-friendly content, considering that not all IPs and animations are safe to watch. Creating educational content for children is indeed more complex than haphazard content, so wisdom is also needed to teach children.

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