



The dark side of YouTube and YouTube kids is not fixed yet.

Dodgy You-tube videos are in the news again. Momo is a confirmed hoax, as are the stories of children harming themselves as a result. There is no Momo. Parents themselves jumped the shark and bought into the game, sending the media into a frenzy. This is not a Momo article, but parents should be advised to check multiple, legitimate sources before failing victim to hoaxes that cleverly play on their obvious concern for their children and fear of the evils of the internet.

What IS worthy to note is that this is not for the first time that the legitimacy of the available content on YouTube is up for scrutiny.

Safe on Social thought it might be time for a small reminder about the need to supervise your child's YouTube viewing, and to show you that there are far worse things on the internet that you maybe unwittingly allowing your very young child to watch.

Like Elsagates, the Momo of 2017 - except these have not gone away.

You tube and the very young.

There's no doubt that You-tube has some fantastic, legitimate children's programmes uploaded. And there also no doubt that a large number of our pre-school and primary school kids spend a fair amount of time on electronic devices and TV's watching these. We get it, sometimes 15 minutes of quiet is necessary with a toddler or small child.

But.
All is really not what it seems with many of the kids shows listed in the YouTube search engines and parents need to be aware of this persistant problem.

What was and what is an Elsagate?

This strange term is a new word, a tech term recognizable in industry that hasn't pervaded into mainstream use used to specifically explain a piece of internet fraud perpetrated on little children. It came into the vernacular when Elsa from Frozen was given some unpleasant treatment on YouTube in 2017.

Elsa, the popular child hood star of Frozen , and her sister Anna featured on YouTube in a number of twisted videos , unauthorised by Disney that placed the well-loved character in dangerous , violent situations and saw her grappling with issues and language no Disney character will ever experience. These were not suitable

for the target audience of Frozen AT ALL. Elsa was often show pregnant, or she and Anna appeared with their clothes suggestively torn with Spiderman making an appearance to up-skirt the pair of them, and all this was accompanied by happy nursery rhymes incomprehensibly burbling in the background. It was a disaster, and no one knew where these videos were coming from.

Now the term Elsagate refers to videos on YouTube that are categorised by YouTube as child friendly, that are actually really not. The content included is actually wildly inappropriate filling the categories of violence, sex, drugs, alcohol, foul language, bondage, fetishes etc with generally unpleasant activities being conducted by a child favourite TV hero.

This list below was collated on Reddit, the internet board - which essentially began an investigation into Elsagates in 2017 with tens of thousands of members tracking down and collating/reporting as many of these channels as possible and all the relevant media about this. Once a clip was located with this content, and determined to be an Elsagate it would be reported to YouTube and removed but this is a drop in an ocean of weirdness.

Inappropriate Topics

Shock Value - anxiety

- Spiders / Scorpions / Other bugs
- Injections
- Gore (cuts, decapitations, severed arms/legs/tongues)

Disorientation

- Camera work (disorienting angles, shaking camera, closeups)
- Irregular sizes (giant babies, tiny humans, small humans with huge heads)

Body dysmorphia

- Belly inflation
- Stretched out limbs
- Amputated limbs

Sexual

- Kissing
- (partial) nudity
- simulated pornographic acts

Fetish

- Scatological
- Urination
- bondage (tied up)
- belly inflation
- ball busting

Inappropriate / Violent / Nasty Criminal behaviour is encouraged (often accompanied with laughter and happiness)

- Theft
- Assault
- Sexual assault
- Murder
- Cannibalism
- Dismemberment
- Drinking
- Toilet related

Why use the word weird? Because it's very odd thing the Elsagate. There are literally hundreds of thousands of accounts posting these weird mash-ups of popular children's characters side by side with inappropriate content, with millions of views and for the majority - no one is sure who is making them.

The videos are usually animation or live action films, use unauthorised characters, are often able to get around the inbuilt child safety algorithms in YouTube kids, use keywords typically for a respectable search – education, nursery rhymes, learn numbers and the like. They are all over YouTube who in 2017 lost control of its moderation for children's content.

YouTube is such a behemoth that it has become impossible for it to moderate all its content and the result is this extremely strange stuff filtering through to your child YouTube viewing device. Public outcry about what children were seeing on YouTube in 2017 led to the start of YouTube attempting to address the Elsatgate problems.

YouTube slowly swung into action, and in August 2017 they prohibited the practice of monetisation from any channels that "made inappropriate use of family friendly characters". That was a start, limiting the wealth of money from advertisers these Elsatgates could generate.

(They also extended this policy to the live action children shows often featuring children and their parent and filmed at home. This after many of the videos featuring minors were found to have been downloaded by paedophiles, and after a particular channel called Toy Freaks – run by an enthusiastic dad called Greg Chism was brought up on child abuse charges after it was discovered he was happily placing his two daughters in potentially abusive situations to generate more clicks and likes. The channel was pulled with 8.5 million subscribers.)

YouTube went into clean-up mode in late 2017 announcing that over 50 channels, and over 150,000 videos were removed, multiple comments sections (over 625,000) were switched off that had suspected/confirmed paedophile chatter yet this was a drop in the ocean of Elsatgates.

While it is to be congratulated on making a start, the number involved just serve to show how thoroughly YouTube has lost control over its ability to protect children and make good its assurance about the safety of your child valid especially on the YouTube kids channels which had a large number of Elsatgates filtering through the moderation algorithms.

YouTube grudgingly acknowledged that its electronic moderation system for YouTube kids was defunct in April 2018, it was unable to pick up the blatant difference between an Elsatgate or a legitimate children's video – and YouTube Kids returned to human moderation. With a platform that sees in excess of 400 hours of content uploaded every minute, their achievements are limited. Elsatgates abound.

The simplest theories about the existence of the Elsatgate and what is behind them vary from sinister to financial.

A connection between paedophiles and pornography.

This is a nasty theory. It suggests that by deliberately exposing young children to inappropriate behaviour they will at a later time be more receptive to being groomed.

In the example shown below featuring Peppa pig needles and violence are used to enforce compliance in Peppa pig – this theory offers the idea that a familiarisation with the needles implies a future use of sedation and the violence used suggests punishment for a failure to obey.

The sometimes nonsensical incomprehensible commentaries on the videos, have led to claims being made that this in fact a code directing paedophiles to other illicit content, and that while in English the dialogue makes no sense - switching your keyboard to another alphabet and typing in these phrases translates them to understandable English.

This is not a confirmed theory, but there is considerable paedophile activity on many Elsatgates in the comments section, so these clips are unsafe regardless of the origin.

Not for kids at all.

The internet has connected groups of individuals known as fetishists who previous were fairly isolated in their pursuit of unusual pleasures. Another theory is that these are designed for the individuals with superhero fetishes, or those who enjoy pretending they are a child?

A prank

Well perhaps, but the sheer volume of numbers of these videos tends to dismiss the idea that this is just a big internet prank. And if it is, well it's still a nasty one.

Money

As many of these clips garner millions of hits, this is a possibility. YouTube's moves in late 2017 to prevent the monetisation of these clips, may have limited this a little but the need to make as much money as possible does not explain why the content is so disturbing.

Algorithms and bots

Maybe it's not the bogey man in the closet, maybe it's algorithms that correlate the likes and the clicks determining that there should be more of something that is popular? And that any old hodge podge will do. A popular children's animation star is going to be popular, even more if there are two together, and then on and on – adding violent content, inappropriate actions that garner more clicks because they were popular elsewhere and things have just spiralled.

Tim Pool a YouTuber with over 30 million subscribers offers an explanation of this scenario detailing how many ElSagate videos possess the same animations and stories, but with different characters that could easily be generated by computers.

“There is a computer programme that simply has the characters and the thumbnails ready to go as wireframes, then changes the cels - the characters' animations - then automatically uploads them with the most popular tags that are on YouTube. This is why we see Donald Trump and Hitler fighting. This is why we see Hitler using the toilet... this is what happens when an artificial intelligence tries to give us what we want.”

Given that a young child is often unable to type the search parameters into Youtube, they will choose topics from what Youtube's search engine produces. Many of these videos feature high in the search listings with their collective weird wordings compiled from all popular keywords across the platform.

Titles of clips such as the ones below are indicative of how this might be possible, otherwise it's difficult to explain where such a title comes would come from.

'TONGUE BIT OFF! Pregnant Mommy Bit Off Tongue Eating Watermelon Doc McStuffins Checkup Farting Mommy'

'Rapunzel & Minnie vs Natural Disaster!'

“PAW PATROL Babies Pretend To Die MONSTER HANDS From MIRROR! Paw Patrol Animation Pups Save For Kids”

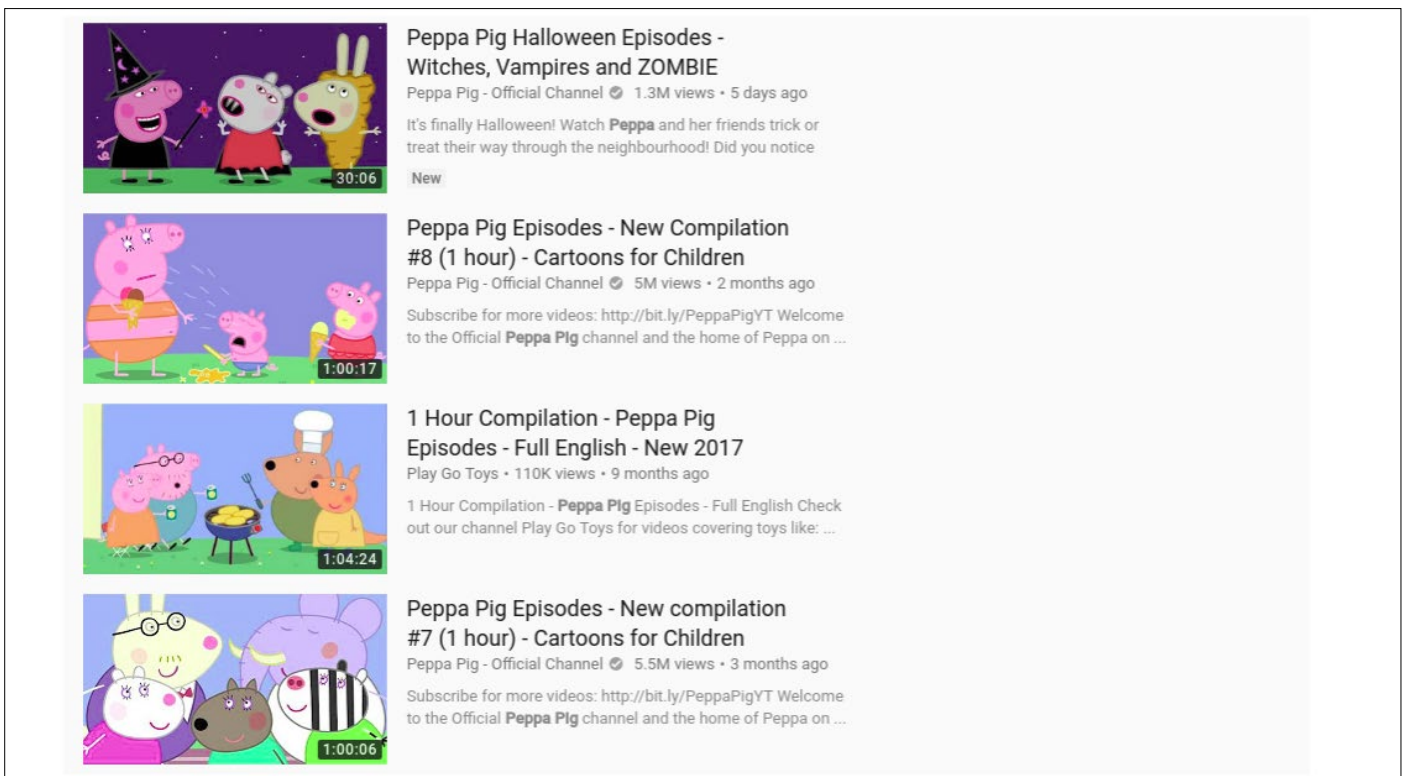


These make no sense, yet it is far from inconceivable that artificial intelligence is having a whoopsy here that needs to be stopped.

There are many possibilities but the most likely remains algorithms that, lacking any human input are frantically producing more and more content that is popular but weird violent and dubious and categorically inappropriate for the target audience.

Elsagates appear high in the YouTube search listings

In the search result show below, the third one is an Elsagate. An adult can see and read the origin channel but a child working their way through Youtube will not be so discriminatory.

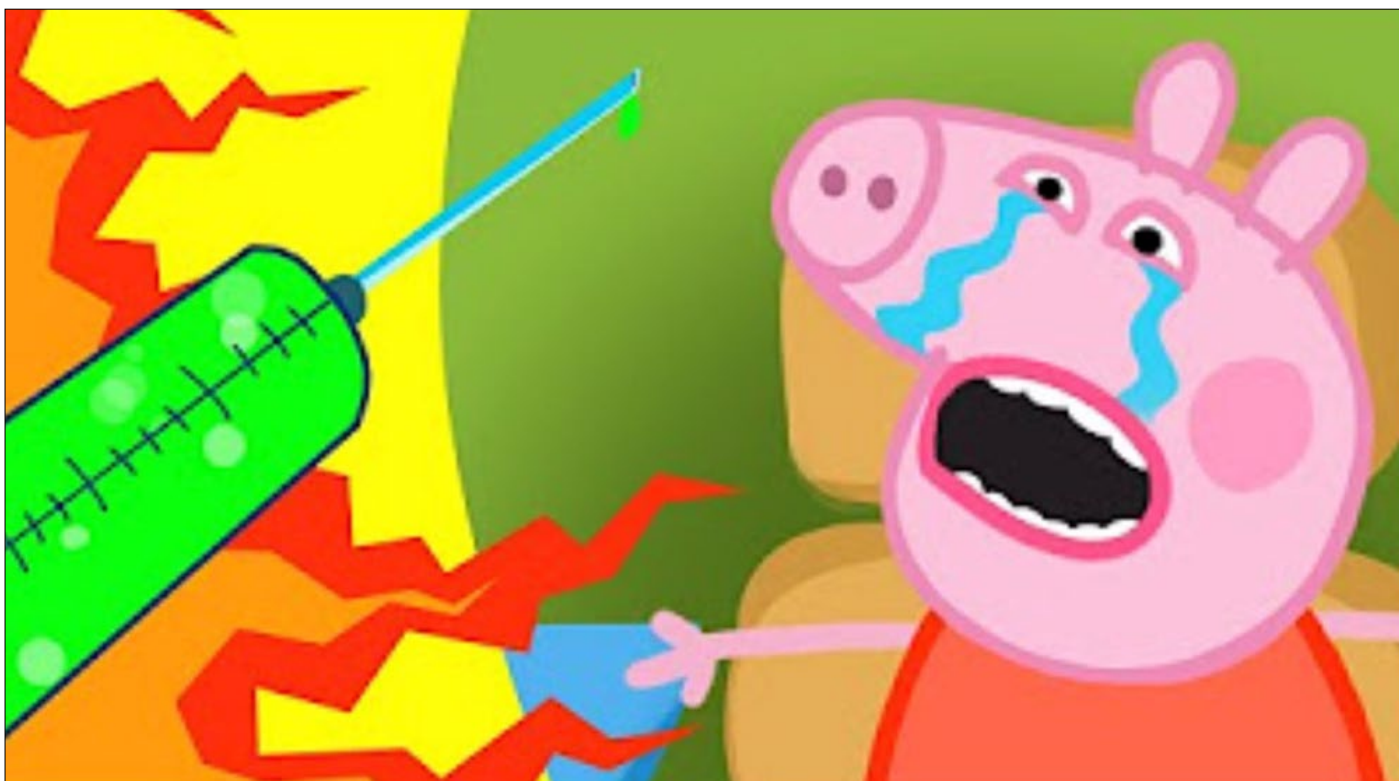


Examples

Peppa Pig

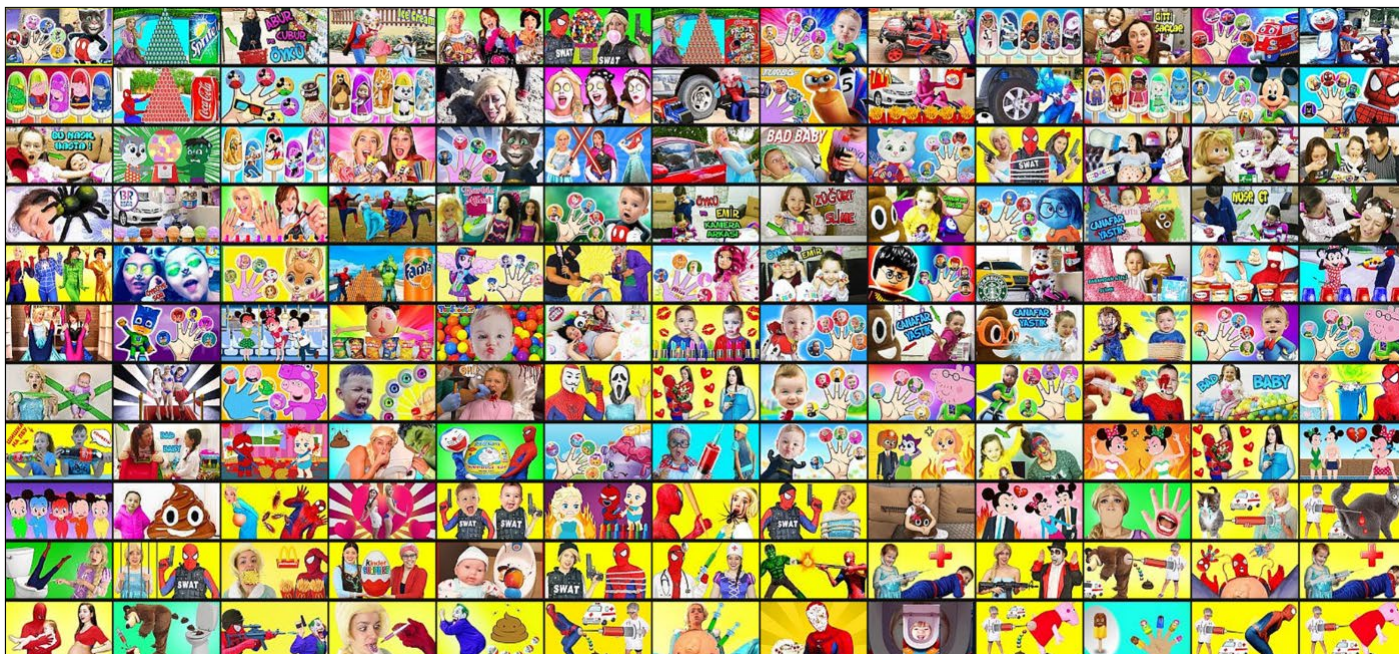
The popular pre-school character of Peppa Pig featured in “fake “videos that popped up in many lounge rooms where a child was watching. The original show is a gentle, appropriate character who surmounts situations with the loving help of her oinky family.

The image shown is from an Elsagate. In the original version Peppa is consoled and reassured about a trip to the dentist. In The YouTube Elsagate version , she is monstered by syringes, violence and gigantic medical instruments and disciplined for her distress.



A couple of compilation of Elsagate screen shots from Reddit





Summary

Watch what your child is watching. Block particular channels, and report them. This is an internet hoax of real concern for parents of younger children.

YouTube's recommendation list does not discriminate between the legitimate and the fake. Given the confusion, the nature of the material children are being exposed to and the impossibility of determining the origin of such clips (and therefore who is commenting on them), Safe on Social suggest parents keep a constant eye on their child's YouTube browsing. Install parental controls but don't rely on them for YouTube – ElSagates are notorious for sliding around the child protection algorithms.

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