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ABSTRACT

Green Lighting the Altruistic Influencer

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This paper comprehensively examines a new type of social media influencer characterized by altruistic tendencies. Utilizing the popular YouTube channel Vlogbrothers as the text for a constant comparative analysis, this research explores how the strategies altruistic influencers use to mobilize their community for good, the characteristics of the altruistic influencers, and how altruistic influencers create community. Through an in-depth analysis of 30 Vlogbrothers videos, the themes of education, community, and shared humanity emerged. Education, shared values, and calls to action are discussed as essential for mobilizing communities in charitable endeavors. Authenticity, quality, accessibility, and solutions-focused action were found to be vital characteristics of altruistic influencers. Structure, collaboration, multi-format content, parasocial relationships, and traditions are discussed as community-building tools for altruistic influencers. This research contributes to the existing literature on corporate social responsibility and purpose-driven organizations within the realm of social media influencers. Furthermore, it introduces the concept of "altruistic influencer" as a distinct category within this literature. By outlining the key characteristics and strategies observed in altruistic influencers, this study provides a valuable framework for other influencers to model and encourages further exploration of this field.

Keywords: social media influencers, altruistic influencers, CSR, corporate social responsibility, purpose-driven organizations, parasocial relationships, constant comparative analysis
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And finally, shout out to John and Hank Green, whose hilarious and thoughtful corner of the Internet inspired me to study altruistic influencers. In their honor, “Don’t forget to be awesome!”
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Social media influencers (SMIs) hold an increasing amount of cultural capital in a social media-filled society. With this attention comes the power to expand their own brand but also make a tangible difference in the lives of their followers and an impact in the world. An influx of research into influencer marketing has explored sponsorship transparency (Childers et al., 2019), analyzed their appealing nature for both fans and collaborators (Jin et al., 2019,) and revealed that SMIs are influential in followers’ decision-making processes (Vrontis et al., 2021; Hudders et al., 2021). Previous research has categorized different types of influencers including spokespersons, billboards, stylists, ambassadors, cocreators, codesigners, consultants, co-owners, facilitators, or partners (Rundin & Colliander, 2021). Though influencers can arise from any niche topic (Khamis et al., 2017), in 2021 the two most common types of influencers were lifestyle and beauty influencers (Statista, 2022b). The global SMI market is worth over 16.2 billion US dollars (Statista, 2022a), with more influencers expanding their brand to capitalize on the demand for their content. However, with over 3.4 million subscribers on their original Vlogbrothers YouTube channel and an additional 25 million over their nine other affiliated YouTube channels (as of October 11, 2022; Vlogbrothers, n.d.-b), a host of related charitable projects, and a wide range of side endeavors, the Vlogbrothers offer a different model to view influencers.

John and Hank Green started their YouTube channel in 2007 as Vlogbrothers and what started as an experiment in video communication between the brothers morphed into an entire community known as “Nerdfighteria” (Pierce, 2020). On top of their entertainment/personality projects and each writing numerous New York Times bestselling novels (Weiss, 2018), the brothers have started various educational, activism, and charitable endeavors (Castellini, 2013) as well as subscription-based businesses raising money for charity (Awesome Socks Club, n.d.-a;
Awesome Coffee Club, n.d.-a). The duo strays from typical influencers because they “have never and will never accept any kind of corporate sponsorship on Vlogbrothers” (Vlogbrothers, 2016) but nevertheless are important thought leaders in the industry (Pierce, 2020).

Even though the Green brothers follow patterns of other social media influencers including building their brands beyond their original social media platform, John and Hank Green represent a different kind of influencer: the altruistic influencer. As thought leaders in the social media influencer world, the Green Brothers have paved the path for harnessing the Internet’s strengths for good: prioritizing education, community, and charity in a multimodal way. This thesis will examine how they built a community dedicated to “decreasing world suck” (Vlogbrothers, 2009a) by examining the strategies utilized in engaging and building relationships with their Nerdfighter fandom, while also mobilizing them for good and expanding their influence. By conducting an analysis of the Vlogbrothers, the characteristics and strategies of altruistic influencers can be better understood.

**Literature Review**

**Influencers**

Traditional social media influencers are defined as users who attract a large following through their use of social media platforms (Enke & Borchers, 2021). As social media has become an integral part of how people connect and express themselves, SMIs’ potential audiences have grown and their influence has been researched as a subject of importance (Nazerali, 2017; Hudders et al., 2021). The typical SMI profile can vary widely depending on their niche, audience, and platform. SMIs can operate on both a micro and macro scale in a variety of settings including such areas as beauty care, travel, gaming, and lifestyle content (Raun, 2018). Campbell and Farrell (2020) categorized influencers into groups based on size and...
impact including mega-influencers with over 1M followers, macro-influencers with 100K–1M followers, micro-influencers with 10–100K followers, and nano-influencers with under 10K followers. Even influencers with smaller followings can have a highly engaged audience, which makes them valuable for marketing. Previous research on influencers has principally explored influencer marketing (Vrontis et al., 2021), product endorsements (Belanche et al., 2020), and SMIs’ trustworthiness compared to traditional celebrities (Jin et al., 2019). Freberg et al. (2011) categorized perceived traits of SMIs and outlined that audiences perceive influencers as credible advice-givers, even more so than CEOs compared in the study.

Regardless of niche or size, SMIs cultivate their personal brand image because their brand is their business. They often do this in tandem with promoting other brands and products through paid partnerships. In addition to collaboration, SMIs also need consistent content creation that resonates with their target audience that establishes brand identity (Jun & Yi, 2020). Actively engaging with their audiences, such as responding to comments, interacting through question and answer sessions is crucial to creating brand loyalty and increasing the emotional attachment of followers to SMIs (Jun & Yi, 2020). Though the financial details of SMIs are beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that content creation and building a brand is the primary job for many SMIs, which is why they endorse products or branch out and create their own businesses that are supported by their social media followings.

Influencer research has been examined in the context of two-step flow and multi-step flow theory regarding how they impact followers’ decision-making practices (Liu, 2007). SMIs can serve as opinion leaders that shape their followers’ perceptions because they have built an open-dialogue community centered on authenticity (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). SMIs cultivate online groups through the platforms they use. In these groups, people choose to follow
influencers whose lifestyle or opinions reinforce their own beliefs or who help them explore new ideas and values (Gabbiadini et al., 2014). With this reaffirming nature, followers can identify with an SMI because they share similar values (Croes & Bartels, 2021) or because followers desire to conform with the perceived identity of the SMIs in a process known as wishful identification (Hu et al., 2020). Croes and Bartels (2021) examined young adults’ motivations for following SMI through the theoretical lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory and found that young people followed SMIs for six reasons: relaxing entertainment, boredom/habitual pastime, information seeking, information sharing, trendiness, and companionship. All six of these motivations were mediated by self-identification with an influencer (Croes & Bartels, 2021).

Authenticity is a key component of SMI’s image as a self-made public figure (Jin et al., 2019). Authenticity is the “degree to which an entity in one’s environment (e.g., object, person, performance) is perceived to be true to or match up with something else” (Moulard et al., 2021, p. 99). Audiences perceive SMI authenticity as an interconnected construct consisting of sincerity, transparency, accessibility, expertise, and uniqueness (Lee, 2020). Consumers believe SMIs are authentic when they behave in a manner consistent with their true selves (Moulard et al., 2021) and Khamis et al. (2017) argue that SMIs must construct an authentic personal brand centered on genuineness and intimacy to succeed. However, as they also point out, this “true self” cannot truly be known to the consumer, just the self-brand the SMI has created. Khamis et al. (2017) coined this an “ironic inversion of authenticity” (p. 203) because SMIs paradoxically cultivate a crafted image of authenticity while they are the decision-makers behind what gets shared with an audience. SMIs truly can be genuine and intimate, but there is still a layer of inauthenticity because they broadcast that image to a wide audience in a staged, self-edited manner.
The tendency of SMIs to cultivate authenticity, self-disclose online, and share everyday moments of their lives lends itself to the development of parasocial relationships (Gibson, 2016). Parasocial relationships will be discussed more in-depth later, but this phenomenon is particularly salient with vloggers (video bloggers). According to Liu et al. (2013), this is because vlogging more realistically parallels face-to-face communication, with viewers picking up on nonverbal communication and emotions in addition to the vloggers’ scripted or unscripted dialogue. Even if a vlogger is crafting an online persona through self-disclosure, authenticity connects SMIs and their audiences (Sangeorzan et al., 2019; Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022).

**Internet Community**

Sometimes an influencer’s reach transcends affecting purchasing decisions and leads to the creation of an entire community. Such online communities are made up of members who share common interests, goals, and/or experiences (Zhou, 2011). Social identity is important to consider in the context of influencers because that enhances influencers’ persuasion power. Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as an “individual’s knowledge that [they belong] to certain groups together with some emotional and value significance to [them] of group membership” (p. 31). These online communities benefit from the interconnectivity and mutual value that members derive from each other (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002). Identity-based communities between strangers thrive online even more so than bond-based online communities which are established on personal relationships (Ren et al., 2007). Furthermore, individuals have also reported experiencing self-discovery, entertainment, and enhanced social interactions as a result of participating in online communities (Dholakia et al., 2004; Li, 2022). Online communities can add a deeper dimension to users’ lives.
In the case of communities surrounding an influencer, these groups can coexist as fandoms. A fandom consists of people who share an interest in a topic, however, that topic can range from sports to niche entertainment. Henry Jenkins, one of the founding academics in the field of fandom studies, explored this concept in detail, defining fandom as an “expansive subculture” of those who share a common identity and culture (Jenkins, 2006, p. 16). This subculture is made up of fans who are not only consumers of a particular cultural article but are also, “active producers and manipulators of meanings” (Jenkins, 2012, p. 24). From these shared subcultures, shared meaning emerges. Fandoms foster an internal culture using inside jokes, terminology, symbols, and holidays/rituals (Fogle, 2015). These shared connections reinforce the power of the group, increasing the bonds not only between individuals and the object of their shared interest but also between each other.

**Multiplatform Content**

Another effective strategy for SMIs to reinforce community and shared interests is through multiplatform and multimodal content. Cross-platform content refers to content spread across multiple platforms, which in turn, means engaging in different mediums and formats. Different platforms require different modes of messaging to effectively reach an audience. Since competing platforms tailor themselves to different affordances for users (Zhao et al., 2013), influencers can expand their reach by adopting new modes of communication. For influencers expanding their brand, their success across a variety of platforms helps them reach new demographics, strengthen loyalty to preexisting fans, and grow their business opportunities (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Studies have shown that when fans follow an entity across multiple formats, they are more likely to engage with the person, brand, or business, deepening ties and loyalty (Jun & Yi, 2020). Hybrid creators can engage with their followers on different
social media sites, as well as other modes outside the digital world, such as in-person meet-ups or monthly subscription boxes.

However, it is important to note that research has also suggested that if an influencer gets too popular with mainstream success, audiences may perceive them as less credible in recommendations. This could be because they are no longer viewed as do-it-yourself entrepreneurs, but instead similar to celebrities whose own success fuels their relevance (Jin et al., 2019). SMIs are, in part, differentiated from celebrities by their perceived relatability and accessibility (Jin et al., 2019). So while there is some overlap, there are still perceived differences between SMIs and traditional celebrities.

Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships are a type of one-sided relationship established between viewers and media figures (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). These relationships usually begin with parasocial interactions with media figures and progress into parasocial relationships. Though the concept of parasocial relationships was first posited by communication scholars Horton and Wohl (1956) to apply to viewers and the public figures the audience viewed on TV, such as celebrities, show characters, and public figures, the concept has expanded to include athletes (Frederick et al., 2012), musicians (Kurtin et al., 2019), politicians (Thorson & Rodgers, 2013), fictional characters from books or movies (Ingram & Luckett, 2019), as well as social media figures (Chung & Cho, 2017). Even though these are one-sided relationships, the viewers perceive public figures to be “a part of the viewers’ own social world” (Rubin et al., 1985, p. 158).

These feelings of fondness are significant. Social media users have reported trusting SMIs at similar levels as they would a friend (Swant, 2016). And in the case of SMIs, the one-sidedness is not as strict as in past parasocial cases with celebrities. Social media opens the
venues for influencers to interact with fans by replying to comments, responding to direct messages, and engaging in conversation over stories to foster a relationship on both sides, even if it is still primarily a one-sided interaction for the fan (Marwick, 2015). According to the 2022 YouTube Culture and Trends report, 69% of Gen Z users report returning to creators that feel “comforting” to them (p. 42). The report points to parasocial relationships for enhancing the effects of comfort media (YouTube, 2022). Cheung et al. (2022) found SMI’s design quality, technology quality, and creativity as significant predictors of parasocial relationships in followers. Parasocial relationships in turn influenced consumers' online brand-related activities (known as “COBRAs”) (Cheung et al. 2022). Though COBRAs can “vary in the degree to which the consumer interacts with social media and engages in the consumption, contribution, and creation of media content” (Schivinski, 2021, p. 66), parasocial relationships play into that interaction.

Parasocial relationships are also evident in the world of podcasts. Podcasts are one realm in which influencers have been broadening their reach in recent years (Dolbec et al., 2021). Podcasts can serve as entertainment, escapism, and social gratification among other uses (Perks & Turner, 2019). Podcasts facilitate intimacy with an audience because they focus using one sense to understand and because podcasts are typically listened to alone (Vickery & Ventrano, 2021). Hosts use emotionality, self-reflexivity, and transparency to strengthen ties with their listeners (Lindgren, 2016). With parasocial relationships and fostered senses of intimacy, listeners are more likely to trust a host, buy a recommendation, or implement advice from them (Altobello & Hilbourn, 2022). For fans of a creator, parasocial relationships enhance the comfort and affective response to content and add another dimension of connectivity worth exploring in this paper.
In vlogging, parasocial interactions are also prevalent. In Hsu’s (2020) study of vloggers and parasocial interactions, they found that attitude homophily, as well as perceived attractiveness, were two important factors affecting viewers’ sense of belonging and parasocial interactions. In turn, this parasocial interaction influenced viewers’ flow experience, sense of belonging, and urge to purchase recommended products (Hsu, 2020). Self-disclosure is also a key factor in vloggers enabling parasocial interactions with their viewers. Self-disclosure facilitates intimacy and perceived trustworthiness and a willingness to pay for additional services or products by the influencer (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022). As discussed previously, authenticity also plays a part in vlogging and parasocial relationships (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Vlogging influencers may tap into parasocial relationships by responding to followers’ questions, liking comments, and giving shoutouts in a way that both reinforces and blurs the line between parasocial interaction and real connection.

**Purpose-Driven Organizations**

Purpose-driven organizations believe they create value for all possible stakeholders, expanding the view from exclusively serving shareholders and including customers, society, the environment, and employees as stakeholders in the organization (Ferrero et al., 2014). Outside forces, such as the environment, are considered stakeholders because companies have a significant impact on the environment through their operations, products, and services, while simultaneously relying on natural resources to operate. Therefore, according to purpose-driven organization viewpoints, they have a responsibility to manage this impact and minimize any negative effects (Ferrero et al. 2014). The environment can be affected by a company's use of natural resources, waste and pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and other environmental factors. In addition, the environment is also important to other stakeholders such as customers,
employees, and communities, who expect companies to act responsibly and sustainably (Dupret & Pultz, 2021). This interdependence between company resources, customers, and shareholders is one of the main reasons for an expanded view of creating value for stakeholders, not just shareholders. A purpose-driven organization is guided by a clear and meaningful mission beyond making a profit (Quinn & Thacker, 2018). These values are communicated both internally and externally and are used to guide decision-making in the company (Quinn & Thacker, 2018).

Purpose-driven organizations are often connected to corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR can significantly enhance an organization's value, with benefits being found to outweigh potential costs (Malik, 2015).

Companies can engage in CSR in several types of ways. Kotler and Lee (2005) outline six different strategies for companies to implement CSR, including: cause promotions, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering, and socially responsible business practices. In cause promotions, companies promote a specific cause, typically through a partnership in the form of a donation to an NGO or donating a portion of sales to charity (Page & Parnell, 2019). An example of cause promotion includes organizations encouraging stakeholders to contribute to a charity on “Giving Tuesday” (GivingTuesday, 2023). Cause-related marketing on the other hand, involves a company tying its products or services to a specific cause, often with a limited-edition product line associated with the cause-related campaign (Page & Parnell, 2019) such as the RED Campaign limited edition products (RED, 2023). Corporate social marketing focuses on behavior-changing campaigns meant to improve social or environmental issues (Page & Parnell, 2019), such as Patagonia’s “Worn Wear” program encouraging customers to repair their existing clothes instead of buying new garments (Michel et al., 2019). Corporate philanthropy includes a direct donation of
resources to a charity or cause, without necessarily expecting a benefit in return (Page & Parnell, 2019). For instance, Apple donated $10 million to help fund COVID-19 test kits (Apple Newsroom, 2021). Though this donation is not tied to their brand nor connected to their products, it was an act of goodwill to all stakeholders by helping during the pandemic.

Community volunteering involves giving employees time off for volunteer work (Page & Parnell, 2019), exemplified by Microsoft’s “One Week Hackathon” event (Carroll, 2019). And lastly, socially responsible business practices mean organizations adopt businesses practices that contribute to a cause (Page & Parnell, 2019). For example, Unilever plans on using 100% renewable energy when making their goods by 2030 (Unilever, 2023). The effectiveness of CSR strategies can vary on factors such as industry, target audience, and the specific goals of a company (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

However, it is important to note that CSR consists of isolated programs or initiatives (Aksak et al., 2016). If a company’s mission or purpose acknowledges its interdependence with all stakeholders and pledges to do good for the world, then it can be considered a purpose-driven organization (Dupret & Pultz, 2021). Purpose-driven organizations can help inspire CSR initiatives in organizations that need reputation management help (Qin et al., 2022). While this is sometimes seen as greenwashing (Gatti et al., 2019), these initiatives can still have a positive impact.

**Research Questions**

Although there has been some research on SMIs partnering up with organizations for the company’s CSR campaigns (see Cheng et al., 2021), the examination of SMIs as their own corporations implementing CSR or being categorized as purpose-driven organizations is an under-examined area in influencer research. Therefore, in this study, I will examine SMIs as if
they were organizations. Like organizations, SMIs also have to manage their brand, reputation, and consumer loyalty. Altruistic influencers correlate with purpose-driven organizations. Just as purpose-driven organizations seek to do right by all stakeholders, not just operate out of profit for shareholders, altruistic influencers also try to make the world better, not just their followers’ lives better. To clarify and differentiate between the two, I will use the term “altruistic influencers” instead of “purpose-driven influencers” because the term “purpose-driven” is vague and potentially misleading. What if an influencer is driven by the desire for fame, fortune, or validation? They would still be “purpose-driven” in that endeavor. For that reason, I use the term “altruistic influencer” as it is more readily apparent what motivates their purpose. I define altruistic influencers as “social media influencers who, despite their niche, use their following to promote the welfare of others.” Similarly to how purpose-driven organizations seek to create value for all possible stakeholders, altruistic influencers try to create value for all possible stakeholders, even those beyond their direct following.

Even with the similarities between purpose-driven organizations, influencers operate differently than organizations and thus have different strategies for success and often different aims. With that in mind I pose the following research questions for this study:

RQ1: What strategies does an altruistic influencer use to mobilize their community for good?

RQ2: What characteristics of the altruistic influencer can be extrapolated from the content posted by the Green brothers in their Vlogbrothers YouTube videos?

RQ3: How do altruistic influencers create community?
Method

Constant Comparative Analysis

Since this study examines a relatively unaddressed topic, I used constant comparative analysis to generate insight about altruistic influencers. Constant comparative analysis is a process where data is compared with the next incident of data until themes and categories emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to further develop grounded theory, the method is a useful qualitative tool because it does not require the research to examine “all available data, nor is the data restricted to one kind of clearly defined case” (Glaser, 1965, p. 438). The steps of comparative analysis consist of examining the open data (in this case, Vlogbrothers videos) as follows:

1. Create categories from incidents that occur in the data.
2. Integrate the diverse categories and their characteristics.
3. “[Delimit] the theory and the original list of categories proposed for the coding” (Glaser, 1965, p. 441).
4. When saturation is reached, create the theory that connects all the coded categories together (Glaser, 1965).

While I started the research in an open coding fashion, the original themes and categories examined were in-line with the research questions: I analyzed the strategies for mobilization, characteristics of altruism, and engagement with the community.

One of the benefits of a grounded theory approach is the possible discovery of themes you might have not originally expected to find (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). For the purpose of this research, I utilized constant comparative analysis to examine Vlogbrothers YouTube videos. This line of research gave insight into how the Green brothers strategically connect with their
community and, in so doing, create a new type of influencer in the process: the altruistic influencer. Because of the richness of the video format, constant comparative analysis of a select amount of data illuminated important insights without the undue pressure of coding 15 years of vlogs, as a traditional content analysis might require.

**Texts Analyzed**

For this study, I exclusively examined the Vlogbrothers’ YouTube videos. John and Hank Green have multiple channels and various social media platforms but since John Green describes YouTube as their “community hub” (Vlogbrothers, 2016a) and since the Vlogbrothers channel specifically was the origin of all their other projects, the videos on this platform are most significant for this research. As the nexus for their other multi-format projects, the Vlogbrothers channel will be examined to see how it refers to outside projects.

This study examined 30 Vlogbrothers videos spanning the past 15 years. Although 30 videos are not representative of the whole of the Vlogbrothers’ work, it sufficed for the scope of this study. I selected the two most watched videos from each year since they started the channel in 2007 to 2022 for constant comparative analysis. These were selected because they have the highest potential reach to the community (See Appendix A for the full list of videos and corresponding views). It was important to include the full span of their time as YouTubers to track how their approach has changed over time. From the 30 videos analyzed, themes emerged and provided crucial data points on how the altruistic influencer operates. Since these themes exemplify both the Green brothers’ core components of building community, videos with the widest reach help illustrate how these longtime trendsetters are lighting the way for other altruistic influencers to follow.
Coding Procedure

The coding procedure took place as follows. First, I used the fan-run Nerdfighteria wiki site (https://nerdfighteria.info/) to help organize all the videos in a spreadsheet with the date posted, video title, video duration, number of views, links to the video recording, and a transcript of each video. The most watched videos of each year were pulled from these lists and compiled into a master reference list (see Appendix A).

To analyze the videos, I began by compiling the top-viewed videos on the Vlogbrothers' YouTube channel into a YouTube playlist. I then watched all the videos chronologically in a split view screen, with the video playing on one side and a transcript pulled from the Nerdfighter wiki site open on the other. As I watched, I identified incidents such as alternating hosts, varying locations, different styles of videos, and changing video topics, and created categories based on these incidents. I used different colors to identify themes, noting patterns in the images used, topics discussed, rituals, and other recurring elements on the transcript list.

After the initial reading, I developed concepts and categories to help organize the data into relevant characteristics as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). I then re-read the transcripts multiple times, refining the themes into different categories depending on the characteristics of the findings with each reading. Throughout this process, I also noted recurring rituals and trends in the videos, as these played into overarching themes and helped define my understanding of altruistic influencers. To tie together my categories and subthemes into a comprehensive reading of altruistic influencers, I used axial coding (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). This involved linking together the themes and subthemes to create a more detailed and nuanced understanding of altruistic influencers.
Justification

**Vlogbrothers**

Since the Vlogbrothers have successfully used YouTube as a medium to connect with a wide audience for the past 15+ years they have served as case studies for other academic inquiries in the past. Waugh (2017) examined why teens turn to Nerdfighteria specifically for a communal internet space, Cunningham and Craig (2017) explored brand authenticity through the lens of the Vlogbrothers, and Catellini (2013) and Lillqvist (2020) have all gained deeper insights on online communities using the Vlogbrothers as a case study. With a precedent of discussion in academia, the Vlogbrothers will be the source of data in this study since they have years of material to work from and a large following. Focusing on the Vlogbrothers as a case study for altruistic influencers is further justified by their embodiment of the 2022 official YouTube Culture and Trends report. This report outlines that YouTube is trending towards content that is community-driven, with multi-format expression often led by “comfort creators” (YouTube, 2022, p. 21). This study will expand upon previous research by adding the lens of altruistic influencers to the discussion.

The Vlogbrothers’ YouTube channel consists of real-life brothers John and Hank Green. In 2007, they started a collaborative YouTube vlog *Vlogbrothers* for a project dubbed “Brotherhood 2.0” as a bonding experiment where the daily vlog would be the only means of communication for a whole year: no texting, no calls, no emails (Castellini, 2013). Through these daily vlogs, the brothers gained a following and continued the vlog, albeit only twice a week instead of daily, after the year-long project ended. As of April 2023, the channel has over 928 million views (Vlogbrothers, n.d.-a). Their channel covers a spectrum of content, from rambling thoughts to educational content to personal and professional updates. As Cunningham and Craig
(2017) note, “All of the Vlogbrothers content – even their mundane or most nerdy stuff – is centered around civic, political, personal politics and social issues, prompting the broader Nerdfighters to consider their own role as agents of social change” (p. 78). From this shared mission arises the fandom surrounding the brothers: Nerdfighteria.

**Nerdfighteria**

The community that has emerged surrounding the Green brothers is known as “Nerdfighteria,” with individual members being called “Nerdfighters” (Lillqvist, 2014). The name does not imply that these fans are people who fight nerds, but rather they are as Hank Green describes in an interview with the *Washington Post*, “People who are pro-nerd: They fight for nerd culture, to celebrate intellectualism, to find and build spaces on the Internet that are devoted to engagement and meaningful conversations instead of distraction and echo-chamber conversations” (Peterson, 2014, para. 8). Nerdfighteria supports traditionally “nerdy” subjects like the Green brother’s other projects like SciShow, but are not limited to the Green brothers only and support gaming, literature, art, and other internet entertainment (Castellini, 2013). They also fight “world suck” in an attempt to make the world a better place through considerable charitable activities (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2013).

**Nerdfighter symbols.** Nerdfighter culture has developed many internal slogans, signs, and slang contributing to their strong sense of identity and community (Lillqvist, 2014; Mustonen, 2015). The main slogan of Nerdfighteria is “DFTBA” which stands for “Don’t forget to be awesome.” The phrase is the namesake of the Green brothers’ merchandise website (DFTBA.com, n.d.), the acronym adorns the uniforms of the English soccer team AFC Wimbledon (partially sponsored by John Green; AFC Wimbledon, 2017), and the slogan was even referenced by President Barack Obama when he met with Hank Green as part of the
“YouTube asks Obama” event (Whitehouse.gov, 2016). The nerdfighter “gang sign” (Vlogbrothers, 2009a) consists of crossed hands making a Vulcan-like symbol. These signs, symbols, and slogans reinforce the community of Nerdfighteria because outsiders do not understand the reference (Lillqvist, 2020). However, even with these insider language examples, the culture of Nerdfighteria embraces inclusion with the Green brothers declaring: “If you want to be a Nerdfighter, you are a Nerdfighter!” (Vlogbrothers, 2009a). They also include an “Official Nerdfighter Lexicon” dictionary on their community website so even though the phrases are insider-specific, they do not gate-keep that information (Nerdfighteria, n.d.)

Charitable Efforts

Another vernacular phrase particular to the Nerdfighter community is “fighting world suck,” which refers to combatting societal problems. The fact that they refer to this in colloquial terms and with a phrase specific to their group illustrates how important activism is to their core values community (Lillqvist, 2020). One Nerdfighter, Esther Earl, who passed away from cancer in 2011, inspired the *This Star Won’t Go Out Foundation* which raises money for families tackling childhood cancer (TSWGO, n.d.), and has inspired the holiday “Esther Day” in the Nerdfighter community (TSWGO, 2022). While the Green brothers have hosted charity-raising events since the beginning of their YouTube days, they officially started their charity “The Foundation to Decrease World Suck” in 2012 (Fight World Suck, n.d.-a). Additionally, half of the revenue from YouTube ads on their Vlogbrothers channel also funds the foundation compared to only a quarter going towards Complexly, the parent company of the Green brothers’ various projects (Fight World Suck, n.d.). The remaining quarter of ad revenue goes towards a sponsorship fund to help other educational creators build their channels (Vlogbrothers Sponsorship Application, n.d.). It is important to note that the decision to enable pre-roll ads and
where to send the revenue from the advertisements was decided with help from Nerdfighteria (Vlogbrothers, 2014a). Another source of revenue for the Foundation to Decrease World Suck is the Greens’ subscription-based companies. They created the Awesome Socks Club and the sustainably sourced Awesome Coffee Club where 100% of the profits from these monthly subscriptions go towards their foundation (Awesome Socks Club, n.d.-a; Awesome Coffee Club, n.d.-b).

The biggest recipient of funds from the Foundation to Decrease World Suck has been Partners in Health (Fight World Suck, n.d.-b). Specifically, since 2019, the biggest Partners in Health project the Green brothers and Nerdfighteria have rallied around is building the Maternal Center of Excellence in Sierra Leone, which at the time of the project's conception, had the highest maternal mortality rate in the world (Vlogbrothers, 2020a). In a video about the project where John Green reported on being on track to exceed their $25 million goal thanks to Pizzamas, P4A, and their subscription businesses he said, “In the last 13 years Nerdfighteria has accomplished some amazing things but this has to be the most amazing” (Vlogbrothers, 2020a; Vlogbrothers, 2022a).

**Project for Awesome.** The Vlogbrothers sponsor several charitable events throughout the year in partnership with Nerdfighteria. The Project for Awesome (shortened to P4A) is an annual event where both the Green brothers and featured guests run a 48-hour live stream and perform challenges, prompts, and discuss charities to raise money for the Foundation to Decrease World Suck. During the first day of the event, the money raised is split and donated to NGOs chosen by John and Hank Green. On the second day, the online community votes on which NGOs should receive the funds based on the videos made by fellow Nerdfighters (Project for Awesome 2022, n.d.). As of 2022, they have raised over 17 million dollars during the P4A
events (Wurst, 2022), with 2022 holding the record with over 3 million dollars raised during the 48-hour live stream (Project for Awesome 2022, n.d.).

The P4A raises money and awareness in several ways. Donations for the P4A are accepted either through a simple donation, matched donation, watching the stream, or in exchange for “perks” consisting of Project for Awesome-themed merch and gifts as well as digital downloads including memes made during the live stream (Project for Awesome 2022, n.d.). In the early days of P4A, the Green brothers and Nerdfighteria successfully “gamed” the YouTube algorithm to make the videos promoting charities take over the YouTube homepage (Saleem, 2007). In more recent years, during the live stream, Nerdfighteria has rallied around quotes said during the stream leading to the phrases trending on Twitter (Vlogbrothers, 2022b). While this might not be an intentional strategy to raise awareness for the charity event, it is another measure of Nerdfighteria impact.

**Pizzamas.** Pizzamas is an annual charity fundraiser event hosted by the Green brothers that is a celebration of fandom and charity. Pizzamas stems from an inside joke created by Nerdfighteria and embraced by the Green brothers: a red and white picture of John Green with a mustache affectionately referred to as “Pizza John” (Vlogbrothers, 2014b). During the two weeks of Pizzamas, Hank and John upload videos every weekday in a nod to their first year as vloggers. They also sell limited edition Pizzamas merch sporting John’s mustache face that is only available during the two weeks of Pizzamas with all proceeds going to charity (Vlogbrothers, 2020b). Pizza John, the “meme we refuse to let die,” (Vlogbrothers, 2020b) has become a symbol of recognition among the community, and the iconic red shirt is a “nerdfighter badge” (Vlogbrothers, 2014b).
**YouTube Partnerships**

As both successful early adopters of YouTube and a channel that has maintained its popularity throughout the years, the Green brothers have been influential in shaping the platform. They were selected as one of twelve channels to beta-test YouTube’s “community” feature as Community Ambassadors (Vlogbrothers, 2016; Cunningham & Craig, 2017); a feature that reinforced YouTube as not only an entertainment platform but also a social media hub (Khan, 2017). The duo also founded VidCon, a conference where independent video creators, industry players, and fans can connect in real life (VidCon, 2022). YouTube also sponsored the Green brothers to start their CrashCourse channel as part of Google’s $100 million project to fund more original channels (Hustvedt, 2012). The Green brothers’ ongoing partnership with YouTube makes them an important influencer to examine as they continue to shape the platform’s trends, culture, and community both off and online.

**Other Projects**

Although the Vlogbrothers’ YouTube channel remains John and Hank Greens’ primary social media hub, they have expanded to various other projects on top of their media work. They started several other YouTube channels including Crash Course (over 14 million subscribers), SciShow (over 7 million subscribers) (Vlogbrothers, n.d.-b), the Emmy award-winning *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (over 94 million views) (The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, n.d.-a.; The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, n.d.-b), and other channels as part of their business Complexly (Complexly, n.d.). In order to more sustainably source CrashCourse after YouTube’s original channels’ initiative shifted, they created a crowdsourcing platform called Subbable, which was later acquired by Patreon (Pham, 2015). They also host a podcast *Dear Hank and John* where they connect with listeners by answering questions and giving “dubious advice” (Dear Hank and John, n.d.). Both
brothers are active on TikTok, but Hank is especially known on the platform with over 7 million followers compared to John’s 2 million (H. Green, n.d.; J. Green, n.d.). These media projects are in addition to the *New York Times* bestselling books they have each written (Weiss, 2018) and John Green’s work as an executive producer on film and TV adaptations of his novels (IMDb, n.d.).

**Caveat**

Based on John and Hank Green’s tremendous success in utilizing their fandom for good, as demonstrated through their charitable efforts, this thesis seeks to examine how they have been able to mobilize their community to help conscientious creators do likewise. While some might credit John Green’s celebrity status as the main contributor to their success, as outlined in their history, the Green brothers together gained popularity through their Vlogbrothers channel even before John Green became a household name with his book and the subsequent movie adaptation of *The Fault in Our Stars*. And as Campbell and Farrell (2020) outline, influencers gain celebrity status as they reach a wider audience so the reasoning that John Green might be considered a celebrity does not detract from his role as an influencer. The distinction between celebrities as the object of fascination for a group, whereas John Green considers himself to be part of the Nerdfighteria group, not just the object of their devotion also differentiates himself from other celebrities (Peterson, 2014). For admirers focusing solely on his role as an author, John Green is a celebrity author, but for his fans who interact with him through his internet presence, his role extends beyond an influencer to that of fellow group members.

Although both brothers have written noteworthy novels and embarked on influential solo projects, this paper will not examine the impact of their books as the focus of this research is on their digital media influence in their collaborative channel. Although Nerdfighteria celebrates
these other projects, the community exists because of the Vlogbrothers YouTube channel, which is why this research study will focus on the channel through a constant comparative analysis. However, their other projects contribute to their brand as conscientious creators so while those videos will not be analyzed, references to them will be tracked as these branches might be an important factor to consider when examining the Green brothers’ strategy for building an online community.

Another caveat to consider when examining the Green brothers as influencers is their vow to never take corporate sponsorships for their YouTube channel (Vlogbrothers, 2016), a huge area of past research for influencers (Ledbetter & Meiser, 2021). However, while they do not take sponsors for their Vlogbrothers channel, they did accept grant money from Google to start CrashCourse (Hustvedt, 2012) and have sponsored ads as part of their podcast. So while they differ from traditional influencers regarding corporate sponsors on their channel, they still navigate brand negotiations like other influencers in other areas of their work.

Results

Three major themes emerged from the constant comparative analysis of the coded videos: shared humanity, education, and community. Sharing humanity, supporting education, and fostering community in turn all support an overarching theme of embracing the complexities of life. The theme of community includes three subthemes of identity, collaboration, and structure. These themes highlight the shared values of altruistic influencers and the community that participates around them.

Shared Humanity

For the Vlogbrothers, acknowledging and celebrating our shared humanity stems from viewing people and the systems that connect them in complex ways. Focusing on shared
humanity by exposing the complexity and complications of life aids the Vlogbrothers as they tackle tricky topics like human sexuality, climate change, and the refugee crisis. While many of these topics are highly politicized, John and Hank Green approach them from a place of non-partisanship. They try to tease out shared cultural connections so that these polarizing topics are less black and white. By focusing on shared interconnectedness, their audiences are better able to understand the layers complicating the issues because they are focused on tackling the problem, not attacking people. While humanizing issues does not automatically lead to solutions, it can lead to facing those issues with compassion. For example, in a 2015 video about the refugee crisis, John Green said:

We are one species sharing one, profoundly, interconnected world, and we humans, all humans, are OUR people... It’s hard to imagine people complexly, especially when you're being told to fear them, but I've found it helpful to listen so I’ve put together a playlist of refugees telling their stories. I’d ask you to listen to them, to believe them, and to see them as people instead of merely as threats. (Excerpt 1, Vlogbrothers, 2015a)

By approaching difficult topics with an emphasis on compassion, not contempt, the Vlogbrothers take an optimistic stance not typical in a media environment that is perpetually outraged.

The coding revealed that the Vlogbrothers framed discussions about current events in an attempted bipartisan manner. In a video explaining the attack on an American consulate in Libya Hank introduced the video by saying:

The trouble is, learning about Benghazi is, no matter what, going to expose you to a great deal of partisan anger. Figuring out why this is, what actually happened, what it means, and hopefully, removing it a little bit from that crazy, angry partisan grandstanding is what we’re gonna try to do in the next seven minutes. (Excerpt 2, Vlogbrothers, 2015b)
However, in that same video, he also acknowledges his own biases, saying, “The question is, is it just my own bias that makes me think that all these other people are biased?” (Vlogbrothers, 2015b). By acknowledging biases, but still attempting to convey information from a nonpartisan platform, the Vlogbrothers examine issues in a more complex way that unites viewers instead of putting them in political camps.

Part of how the Vlogbrothers connect with their current audience is by emphasizing a shared connectedness between the humanity of the past, present, and future. Videos like “Most People Have Never Been 20” were coded under shared humanity and viewing history complexly as John connects the changing rates of child mortality across the ages to actively shaping a better future by actions made today. As he explains, “We can’t do anything about historical rates of premature death, of course, but we can choose to live in a world where fewer people die early” (Vlogbrothers, 2022). By tying in charitable actions even into lighthearted videos such as “Dr Pepper Enthusiast John Green Taste Tests Dr Pepper and Its Misbegotten Pretenders” and framing those donations as active, deliberate choices to help the world at large. The Vlogbrothers leverage the shared connection we have and which they emphasize in their videos, to encourage their viewers to make our shared lived experiences as a collective humanity better.

The Vlogbrothers go beyond connecting humanity as complex individuals living in complex groups working in complex systems where complex events take place but extend to the entire galaxy. Videos such as “We just had our first interstellar visitor… and it’s weird” and “The Utah Monolith. What It Means, Why It Matters, and Whether It’s Aliens” highlight our connection with the rest of the cosmos. Contemplating humanity’s place in the world underscores our tremulous place in the universe but also our unique capacity to marvel at it.
Another theme that emerged from the coding was their focus on education. While their other channel CrashCourse, which can now be watched for college credit (Faller & Murphy, 2023) highlights their dedication to education, that value also exists in their Vlogbrothers channel. Nearly 60% of the most popular Vlogbrothers videos in the past 15 years were coded as “educational” because they heavily addressed topics like science, politics, health, history, music, and media in an informational manner (See Appendix C). The importance of education to the Vlogbrothers is further enforced by the length of the educational videos compared to their more traditional vlog videos. The Vlogbrothers have a self-made rule that videos cannot be longer than four minutes and if they go over four minutes they will be “punished” based on suggestions from followers (Vlogbrothers, n.d.-c). However, they make an exception for educational videos because they do not want to cut corners on important topics. The average time of non-educational videos is 3:38, whereas the average length of their educational videos is nearly double at 7:10 (See Appendix B). This extra effort to use their platform to highlight educational topics is reflected in the coded data. Similar to how they approach people and issues in a nuanced way, that trend continues with their educational content. They acknowledge that “the truth is complex” but they want to “[introduce] the complexity of the [problems]” to their viewers (Vlogbrothers, 2013). By viewing the world with nuance, they leave the door open for learning and curiosity.

Part of the Vlogbrothers tie-in with education is a celebration of learning inherently connected with nerd culture. Nerd culture is deeply tied to the Vlogbrothers’ identity, with their fans being called “Nerdfighters” and the community as a whole being dubbed “Nerdfighteria.” A
factor of how the Vlogbrothers define nerd culture is excitement. John Green describes nerds by saying:

> Nerds like us are allowed to be unironically enthusiastic about stuff. Nerds are allowed to love stuff, like jump-up-and-down-in-the-chair-can’t-control-yourself love it. Hank, when people call people nerds, mostly what they’re saying is ‘You like stuff.’ Which is just not a good insult at all. Like, ‘you are too enthusiastic about the miracle of human consciousness’ (Excerpt 3, Vlogbrothers, 2009b).

This enthusiasm is an important characteristic of Vlogbrothers’ videos to consider. While many of their informative videos are serious in tone such as “Understanding Ukraine: The Problems Today and Some Historical Context” and “How We Fix the Climate” many of their educational videos were coded as informally or entertainingly educational. It was the enthusiasm in these videos that changed the tone. However, videos including “5 Songs You’ve Never Heard That You’ve Heard 1000 Times” and “Top 10 Animal POWER MOVES” were still educational in content. Both versions are important to include because it highlights the Vlogbrothers’ mission to “decrease world suck” from two different avenues. One route focuses on problems with actionable and human-centered solutions, and the other route focuses on the wonders of the world and the joy of discovery. Both paths have discovery and learning at their core.

**Community**

**Identity**

Group identity as a community was a very strong theme that emerged from coding. Communities revolve around shared values and relationships (Cheung et al., 2022). The Vlogbrothers help shape their community’s identity since they are the influencers leading the space. One way they do that is through the name of the community “Nerdfighteria.” John and
Hank Green refer to Nerdfighteria as a whole and shout out specific Nerdfighters throughout the coded videos. Even the act of naming the community strengthens their bond by identifying them as an official community, not just nameless fans. Having a name for the community indicates a stronger relationship because it acknowledges the community as a real more permanent entity instead of an ambiguous phenomenon.

The value of the relationship between the community is reinforced by their motto “Don’t forget to be awesome” (sometimes shortened to DFTBA) and their mission to “decrease world suck.” The Nerdfighteria community centers around shared values and one of those values is a reinforcing cycle of appreciating the community and bettering the community and world at large. Having specific mottos and phrases for that mission fortifies those values for the community because they are statements perpetuated and adopted by Nerdfighteria. It might be self-evident that community is a recurring theme as communities are part of the focus of the research questions, but it is important to consider that this truly is something valuable. Nerdfighteria is a consciously created community, not one of happenstance or unintentional effort. It is intentionally cultivated to help better the world not only through their charitable endeavors but also through creating value for members of Nerdfighteria.

Terminology and inside jokes were also coded as community-building elements in the data because they strengthen group identity. As previously discussed, the Vlogbrothers used shared terminology that members inside the group understand such as the term “nerdfighter,” but they also have inside jokes for measuring John Green’s stress levels based on the puffiness of his hair as in “the puff continues to grow” (Vlogbrothers, 2008). Beyond inside jokes, they also have names for functions of the YouTube platform which serves as their town center or meeting place for the community. They refer to the description bar or “about section” of their YouTube videos
as the “dooblydoo,” as in “I put some thoroughly non-partisan links in the dooblydoo for further reading” (Vlogbrothers, 2013). Having a nickname that members of the group understand for a part of the platform where followers can further engage and interact doubly reinforces the channel as a place for community.

**Collaboration**

The Vlogbrothers actively connected with their viewers in a variety of ways, including collaboration. They collaborated through their question and answer (Q&A) videos where the format of the videos was them answering “real questions from real Nerdfighters” (Vlogbrothers, 2009c). Nearly 10% of the top videos of the past 15 years were Q&A videos (see Appendix C), which by their very nature involve responding to their community. Those types of videos could not exist on the channel without the community collaborating with the Vlogbrothers and providing questions for them to answer. Besides providing the material for videos, the Nerdfighteria community corroborated real-life events to give the Vlogbrothers more insight into current events. For example, in a video about Brazilian politics, Hank Green personally thanked the “members of the Brazilian Nerdfighters Facebook group” for “helping [him] out and keeping [him] straight” (Vlogbrothers, 2016b). By involving their fanbase in content creation, they signify that their channel is a place for collaboration and two-way communication.

Actively creating a community that rallies along shared values helps create parasocial relationships because of shared identification (Cheung et al., 2022). These parasocial relationships are further reinforced by the Vlogbrothers interacting directly with their audience. Besides collaborating with the community for Nerdfighteria traditions, the brothers also interact with followers in the comments. For example, after one video John added, “Leave your questions in the comments and if I don't answer them in the video, I'll try to answer them in a gigantic blog
post” (Vlogbrothers, 2008) and in another one he added, “I can’t wait to read your favorite animal power moves in the comments” (Vlogbrothers, 2010). By actively communicating with fans through comments or other multimodal platforms, factors for developing parasocial relationships were strengthened.

**Structure**

Ritual patterns also were coded in the data and contributed to the theme of community. Even internet communities have cultural norms for their members. Rituals give community members structure because guidelines and expectations have been set, whether those are implicitly or explicitly shared. For example, nearly each Vlogbrothers video coded began with the salutation “Good Morning Hank/John, it’s [day of the week]” and ended with a “Hank/John, I’ll see you on [day of the week]” with each brother alternating in videos (Vlogbrothers, n.d.-a). This format stems from how the channel was originally conceived, as the sole means for Hank and John to communicate with each other. And though these greetings and signoffs might be viewed as excluding the audience from the ongoing conversation between the brothers, the collaborative nature of the channel undermines that interpretation. The brothers are collaborating with each other as well as with the community, so the salutations represent a baton hand-off and indicate a reliable format for the followers to expect. These rituals represent dependability, predictability, and a structure of norms for the community.

Part of those patterns included rules of conduct set by the Vlogbrothers themselves. They also have a clear pattern of alternating between the two brothers, with, since 2008, one video from each brother per week. As previously mentioned, they have a self-initiated time limit of four minutes per video, with the only exception being for educational videos. This engages the community in two ways. By setting up rules, the community knows what to expect from Hank
and John. Unlike other YouTube content creators without a clear schedule, where there can be weeks, months, or even years between uploads, Nerdfighteria knows exactly what to expect from the Vlogbrothers because those expectations have been widely made known through 15 years of uploading. And by involving the community in creating content ideas for the brothers when they break the four-minute rule, their input is validated, appreciated, and encouraged. The punishment itself reinforces that the Vlogbrothers value having guidelines for themselves as creators and collaborate with their followers to maintain those guidelines.

In addition to having patterns of posting that lend themselves to a stable community, the Vlogbrothers also have traditions built around community participation. Though none of the videos coded were directly related to the Project for Awesome, Pizzamas, or Awesome Socks/Coffee Club, even when videos were centered around other topics, these events were referenced. For example, in “Dr Pepper Enthusiast John Green Taste Tests Dr Pepper and Its Misbegotten Pretenders” John compares each spin-off of Dr. Pepper to different types of sock, ultimately concluding that the Awesome Socks Club socks are “the Dr. Pepper of socks” because “these socks are perfect and 100% of the proceeds go to charity. That actually is a distinct difference between our company and Dr. Pepper—I know you’re wondering” (Vlogbrothers, 2022c). They also invite the community to collaborate directly with their charity efforts in shoutouts to the Project for Awesome (P4A). As Hank says at the end of one particular video:

And the Project for Awesome is next week. Next week! Next weekend, you guys! So if you're thinking about making a video promoting your charity of choice, please do that! Get it ready! Because we will as a community next weekend be voting on which of the charities promoted in those videos will be getting grants from the Foundation to Decrease

This excerpt is notable because it invites the community to participate in the event both by creating videos promoting charities and highlights that the funds raised by the P4A are distributed based on a community vote. The community actively contributes to charity not just chosen by the Vlogbrothers, but by organizations advocated for by fellow members of Nerdfighteria. It also illustrates that the traditions of the community center around charitable endeavors that further reinforce their identity as a group that “fights world suck” and makes the world a better place by acknowledging our shared humanity and thus trying to better other people’s lives.

Discussion

I set out to study altruistic influencers in action and as evidenced by the results section, several themes emerged. As I proceed to address each research question, there will be some overlap of themes and because of that overlap, I chose to address the themes extrapolated from the coding for different research questions.

RQ1 - Community Mobilization

Shared Values

Regardless of whether an influencer is considered altruistic or not, the tools for building a community around an influencer are essentially the same. They still must connect with their audiences through shared values and authenticity. The Vlogbrothers fulfill previous findings that SMIs are perceived as authentic when they demonstrate sincerity, transparency, accessibility, expertise, and uniqueness (Lee, 2020). They also follow patterns of previous research suggesting self-disclosure heightens parasocial relationships (Fazli-Salchi et al., 2022). The coding of this
data reinforced previous findings that Nerdfighters support the values of philanthropy, equality, empathy, and sharing knowledge (Escobar et al., 2014) as well as prizing respect, playfulness, generosity, and intellectual thought (Wilkinson, 2012).

Before an influencer can “mobilize their community for good” (RQ1), they must first build a community capable of being mobilized. One of the strategies the Vlogbrothers demonstrate to mobilize their community for good is fostering an environment with shared values that lend themselves to altruism. As self-evident as that seems, it is a key differentiation between traditional influencers and altruistic influencers. The Vlogbrothers acknowledge and celebrate shared human experiences without sugarcoating the complications and problems that come with the human experience and or connected society. They explain problems, questions, and confusions people have about the world but also offer hope that change is possible. The complexities of human experience are weaved in through their discussions of science, politics, history, and other educational topics. This focus allows followers to “explore their values and beliefs in environments they perceive to be safe” (Gabbiadini et al., 2014, p. 5). Building a community around shared values is the first step to moving past a group of fans into a true community.

Education

As outlined in the results section, education is a key theme of the Vlogbrothers, both in their top 30 most popular videos but even more so in John and Hank Green’s broad body of work, as evidenced by Crash Course, SciShow, and even Hank’s reputation as the “science guy” of TikTok (Gupta, 2023). The Vlogbrothers’ focus on educational content supports Croes and Bartels (2021) observation that certain demographics “prefer to watch content that is creative as well as informative” (para. 41) which goes hand in hand with the idea of “edutainment” to both
entertain and educate viewers on a topic (Anikina and Yakimenko, 2015). Though not all their educational videos are done in an edutainment style, even the more serious ones are performed straightforwardly with a low barrier to entry so that the information is accessible to a wide audience. And because of parasocial relationships, wishful identification, and group dynamics, fans are more likely to be invested and interested in the causes and topics of the influencers they follow and the group that surrounds them. Therefore, education is a vital step for altruistic influencers because it is the foundation for mobilizing them in a cause. If followers are uneducated about a topic, they will be less likely to get involved in a cause or rally around solving a problem.

**Calls to Action**

Once there is a foundation of shared value, even if that means educating followers on a topic that then can become a shared value, then influencers can take the next step and mobilize their community. Instead of buying affiliate link products that benefit just the influencer, altruistic influencers twist this business model into one similar to a non-profit. Consumer online brand activities instead benefit a larger cause. A specific strategy utilized by the Vlogbrothers is calls to action. While they build on a foundation of shared value around the complexity of the human experience, they go further by asking followers to take action such as watching a playlist of refugees telling their experiences (Vlogbrothers, 2015a), and actively participating in their fundraising endeavors (Vlogbrothers, 2015b), subscribing to their nonprofit subscription projects (Vlogbrothers, 2022c), and many others. Altruistic influencers deploy their communities to take action in a way that further reinforces their shared values. Those who celebrate our shared humanity are then invited to participate in fundraising efforts to help those in need which then further cements their internal identity as someone who cares about others. They are then more
likely to continue watching the content created by those who help reinforce those views and give them further avenues to behave altruistically.

It is also important to note the Vlogbrothers provide different levels of involvement for fans to decide what works for them, from creating videos for the P4A to donating or subscribing or becoming a Patreon supporter. These varying levels help fans at all levels have an accessible action to follow through to signify their support and involvement. For example, with the P4A, fans willing and able to donate $500+ are invited to join the matching donor fund. However, most people are not in a position to donate that much money, so there are options for exchanging desirable perks at more affordable levels or participating by creating content for the event or even appreciated just for watching the live stream. Therefore, giving varying options at different levels of involvement helps make mobilizing the community more effective because fans are given actionable directions to follow at levels that are accessible to them. There are many avenues to participation, but collectively, they all come together for measurable impact.

These various levels of involvement tie in with Kotler and Lee’s (2005) six categories of CSR. The Vlogbrothers’ limited-edition Pizzamas merchandise is an example of cause-related marketing since the proceeds go to charity. Additionally, the Vlogbrothers encourage their followers to make videos for the P4A that highlight charities, thereby facilitating opportunities for their community to be involved in a cause and effectively engaging them in community volunteering. Furthermore, their subscription coffee and sock businesses represent a combination of cause-related marketing, corporate philanthropy, and socially responsible business practices, as these products are ethically sourced and the profits are donated to charity. Just as fans can engage with the Vlogbrothers’ philanthropy at varying levels, the different types of CSR
engagement practices also offer different avenues for the Vlogbrothers to mobilize their community.

**RQ2 - Characteristics**

**Altruism**

It is self-evident that one of the characteristics of altruistic influencers should be an “unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Part of how the Vlogbrothers express this is through their various philanthropic endeavors. However, I would argue that engaging in philanthropy does not necessarily mean a content creator can be considered an altruistic influencer. In comparison to recent trends in social media such as #HonestyTest, where creators reward others for being willing to help a stranger in need by giving them even more money or giving people experiencing homelessness a large sum of money but filming their reactions without consent (Tait, 2022), while this may be philanthropic, it is not altruistic. Creators who build their careers on giving other people money, such as the popular YouTuber MrBeast, who is known as “YouTuber’s biggest philanthropist” (Alexander, 2018, para. 6), is not truly altruistic because it is not unselfishness driving their actions. In return, those content creators get millions of views and are not truly helping solve systemic issues even if they are assisting individuals. The Vlogbrothers differentiate themselves from other SMIs by emphasizing the importance of our shared humanity and use that interconnectedness to tackle systemic issues. Their philanthropic content is not heavily featured in their top-viewed content because they are building altruism into their community values instead of exploiting it to build their viewership numbers. Understanding the complexity of issues is a key value to the Vlogbrothers because they are trying to solve the root of societal problems to help whole countries and vulnerable minority groups and not just randomly selected individuals.
Understandably, this is a fine line to walk because well-meaning philanthropy indeed can be well-intended and perceived as beneficial. The difference between true altruism and exploitative philanthropy makes altruistic influencers rare because it is more work and less financially rewarding to the influencer. However, they have an extremely powerful role to play outside of traditional religious or political groups to help drive change and build a lasting community. That is why the theme of shared humanity discussed in the results section is so an interesting finding because it goes beyond philanthropy. The Vlogbrothers weave caring for humanity into their core values. More than making donations to outside organizations for boosting their image in the public’s eyes, they provide free resources such as Crash Course to the public for the sake of benefiting others. Of course, philanthropy is also part of their mission, and they also donate to outside organizations such as Partners in Health. However, they do so in a collaborative manner with the community. The importance of collaboration will be explained more in-depth as part of the creating community discussion, but through collaborating with their audience, the Vlogbrothers demonstrate that they are engaging in philanthropic endeavors with an altruistic bent, instead of doing it for prestige. They have a distinct tonal shift between their content and those that use philanthropy in a more exploitative manner.

Shared humanity connects with the core tenet of purpose-driven organizations, and by extension, altruistic influencers. Altruistic influencers seek to add value to all possible stakeholders. Stakeholders do not need to be following or directly involved with the influencer at all because they are all interdependent on each other (Dupret & Pultz, 2021). The Vlogbrothers’ emphasis on the deeply connected, albeit complex, nature of humanity and the universe lends itself to the value system of purpose-driven organizations. They recognize that benefitting underprivileged groups, solving systemic problems, and fighting “world suck” ultimately helps
humanity as a whole. Nerdfighteria’s emphasis on altruistic serving those inside and outside of the community, because of their share, interdependent humanity, positively impacts stakeholders, not just the individual members of the community or the Vlogbrothers’ profitability.

**Balance**

As discussed in the results section, the Vlogbrothers manage to tackle serious topics with humanity, but that is also only one side of their content. They also have a very goofy, playful, and more stereotypical content-creator entertainment side represented in the coded data such as songs and humorous vlogs. However, their “serious” side is balanced with their hope for humanity by emphasizing our interconnected nature. In addition to content, the framing of the content is important to consider for altruistic influencers. Balancing both seriousness and fun helps them lower the inhibitions of the audience, increase parasocial relationships, and cultivate a culture for a well-informed community that is motivated for action, not just stuck doom scrolling. While the Vlogbrothers are “unironically enthusiastic about stuff” (Vlogbrothers, 2009b) their passion represents another important characteristic for altruistic influencers to consider. Even if it's approached from a different angle, positivity and passion are essential for cultivating a culture of compassion. Thus, a significant characteristic for altruistic influencers to develop is tonal balance with the overall channel. This delivery is an important finding because they implement community-building tactics instead of fear or guilt appeals.

**Accessibility**

Another characteristic of altruistic influencers gleaned from the data is that they are solutions-focused. The first step towards establishing a solution for a problem is having a deep understanding of the issue and acknowledging that there are complex layers involved because “you cannot solve the problem if you don’t understand it” (Vlogbrothers, 2021). But they
typically do not leave followers without a call to action. For instance, their video discussing climate change was not called “Climate Change Explained” instead it was titled “How We Fix the Climate” (Vlogbrothers, 2021). Having a solutions-focused narrative can help balance the heaviness of topics and lend a sense of hope to viewers. The characteristic of providing different levels of involvement for activism in the community was previously discussed in the education section of mobilization, but this overlap is still worth noting. Altruistic influencers should characteristically educate their audiences and give them options for how to participate in their calls to action.

As touched upon in the results section and further explained in the education and community mobilization section, education is a key characteristic of altruistic influencers. The Vlogbrothers are especially known for their educational content. As discussed in the results section they attempt to convey information in a nonpartisan manner. While altruistic charities can be funded and run by partisan organizations, it is noteworthy from the coded videos that the Vlogbrothers progress in a nonpartisan effort. This potentially makes them more accessible and unifying in an increasingly politically polarized society. Their content is also conveyed in an accessible tone and manner, which furthers strengthens audiences’ perceptions of authenticity (Lee, 2020). Even when addressing complex problems, they will reference academic studies but explain the findings in a comprehensible format.

**Transparency**

However, even though education is one of the Vlogbrothers’ cornerstones in content, there is one type of video they have stopped producing related to education possibly because of this balance in nonpartisanship. Though this video was not part of the top 30 coded in this study, it is insightful for how the Vlogbrothers operate. As discussed in their 2019 video “Why We
Stopped Making Explainers: EXPLAINED” after over a decade of making explainer videos, helping popularize the format on YouTube, and being extremely successful in the area in terms of viewership, the Vlogbrothers stepped back from making videos in this format. They did this because, in Hank Green’s words:

If you are tasked with giving somebody the whole story of this thing up until now, there's a huge amount of information you have to pick from, you are only going to pick some of it, and there is going to be a strong urge to pick the bits that tell the best story for you. It is the ultimate opportunity to shape a narrative, and a story that's gonna be most compelling is probably gonna be one that meshes well with your values and your biases and also those of your audience…. It's become a lot more clear in the past couple years that we as a society and a world have a really hard time telling the difference between journalism and opinion, and I don't want to be part of boring the line between those two things… I don't know that I trust myself to conjure the level of objectivity that I think the word 'explained' implies” (Excerpt 5, Vlogbrothers, 2019).

Though this explanation might throw doubt on their objectivity in educational content, they acknowledge and recognize that they did their best to be impartial in their previous “explainers” but ultimately decided that even though these videos were “by far the most popular videos [they] ever made,” they would leave it to professional journalists to share (Green, 2021a, 4:00). While some might argue that this move is a missed opportunity for viewership, I would counter that this decision highlights their authenticity. By self-disclosing their own perceived shortcomings in this arena and admitting that they know they will lose views but are willing to make that sacrifice regardless, they remain true to themselves and their existing audience. This strategy instills trust in their community that they will make decisions based on communal and even societal good
versus their personal gain. They are not “selling out” nor are they creating content that others might believe is unbiased when it has an agenda. So, though the Vlogbrothers have stopped making “explainer videos,” they remain true to their values. This authenticity, transparency, and willingness to be dynamic and course-correct when needed are essential characteristics for other influencers to follow, even when it can be perceived as a loss.

**Authenticity**

This previous example of pivoting their content strategy to stay true to their values is just one example of how the Vlogbrothers foster the critical characteristic of authenticity. Lee (2020) outlined that audiences perceive influencers’ sincerity, transparency, accessibility, expertise, and uniqueness as contributing factors to their authenticity. The Vlogbrothers demonstrate sincerity in their emphasis on shared humanity, expertise and accessibility in their educational content, and uniqueness in their approach to harness their community’s power for good, all elements Lee (2020) connects with authenticity. Furthermore, the Vlogbrothers’ consistent practice of being open with their audience and aligning their behavior with their values matches Moulard et al.’s (2021) finding to strengthen perceived authenticity. As Khamis et al. (2017) posited, authenticity is a key indicator for SMI success. Authenticity helps establish trust, thus enabling genuine emotional connection from an audience, intensifying parasocial relationships, and solidifying the foundation for online communities to grow.

**RQ3 - Create Community**

**Prioritize Community**

It is important to note the distinction between altruistic influencers creating their community versus building a following. This is one area that differentiates altruistic influencers from traditional SMIs. Although the visual coding of the videos was beyond the scope of this
project, so video thumbnails were not coded, which is an important part of how YouTube videos succeed via their clickthrough rate. In a discussion about custom thumbnails for YouTube videos John Green said, “We generally don't upload custom thumbnails even though we know if we did it would increase views. You can increase views and decrease the quality of the experience for the community and that's something we don't want to do” (Green, 2021b, 35:10). When it comes to their community, the Vlogbrothers prioritize quality over quantity. That is another reason they stopped making their successful “explainer” videos, because as John Green said, “The comment section of Vlogbrothers is one of the last great places left online—it’s beautiful, it’s an astonishing oasis. If we had continued to make international relations content the comment section would have gotten worse and worse” (Green, 2021a, 4:40). In what might be considered a counterintuitive move, they consciously cultivate a community that does not try to be bigger for subscribers’ sake.

**Structure**

As discussed in the results section, structure is essential for creating a community. The Vlogbrothers have guidelines for their format, norms they include in their content, and patterns of posting. And if they do need to take a week off from posting, they communicate that in the “Community” tab feature on YouTube. These ritual patterns build a structure for the community to rely upon. This dependability may be one way to strengthen parasocial relationships. The 2022 YouTube Trend Report highlights the importance of “comfort creators” whose “familiarity offers comfort” to viewers (p. 21). This idea of a parasocial relationship with a comfort creator is also reinforced by Croes and Bartel’s (2021) findings that one reason young people follow SMIs is for companionship. While parasocial interaction and comfort with the influencers creating content is certainly a significant factor in that, familiarity with routine might also be a
contributing element to deriving comfort from SMIs. When groups “provide clear normative behavior” individuals reduce uncertainty and have more meaningful experiences (Gabbiadini, et. al., 2014, p. 3). Developing community norms, practices, and guidelines is one way to intentionally elevate a group to a community.

**Collaboration**

Communities form around shared values that reinforce individual social identity. Forming group identity is a function of helping people create meaning in their lives (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). As previously examined in the results section, some of the shared values of Nerdfighters are education, helping humanity, and fostering empathy. Different altruistic influencers might have different core values or express them through alternative avenues which would connect them to different demographics. However, one of the ingenious strategies that the Vlogbrothers employ in how they build their community is collaboration. During their huge annual fundraising event, followers create videos promoting their own favorite charities that the rest of the community will view, vote for, and thus determine which organizations will be recipients of that year’s fundraising. By emulating altruistic influencers, they act out their wishful identification (Hue et al., 2020) and, in the process, make an impact beyond conforming and confirming their identity. Moreover, the Vlogbrothers promote a sense of democracy within their fandom, allowing member to have a voice in determining the issues and values that the community prioritizes. Developing projects together is a vital strategy for creating a community culture for YouTubers (Escobar et al., 2014). Through collaboration, altruistic influencers can have a wider reach as they expand their horizons beyond their own ideas and actively engage with the followers in their community. This becomes a strong feedback loop where then
members are further cementing their identity in a community that encourages and thrives because of their participation.

**Group Identity**

Nerdfighters form an identity-based community. The Vlogbrothers build that community through symbols and phrases that indicate participants' belonging through reminders of their identity as part of the group. The in-group phrases “Don’t forget to be awesome” and “decrease world suck” and the name “nerdfighter” with the Vulcan Nerdfighter “gangster sign” all reinforce followers' belonging because they understand the message that others outside of the group would miss. This helps delineate optimal identity which satisfies people’s need for inclusion in a group but also establishes distinctiveness from outgroups (Brewer, 2007). Creating messaging for the community helps strengthen ties within the group as well as assist in defining their values. Altruistic influencers would be advised to use these linguistic and symbolic cues as powerful reminders of community identification.

In the same vein as symbols and phrases, traditions and inside jokes are also factors that help build a community. Humor and friendliness strengthen parasocial relationships (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019), inside jokes reinforce ingroup closeness (Walker et al., 2009), and shared rituals or traditions characterize brand communities (McAlexander et al., 2002). The Vlogbrothers take inside jokes a step further by incorporating inside jokes into annual traditions with the community. Their “Pizzamas” fundraising event essentially is a limited-time-only merchandise sale with the proceeds going to charity where all the products revolve around a meme of John Green. This meme helps Nerdfighters outside of the Internet community as the Pizzamas merch becomes a “badge” to recognizing fellow Nerdfighters in public (Vlogbrothers, 2014b). Inside jokes once again reinforce optimal identity where members can feel close to their
ingroup but feel distinct from those outside the group, while traditions solidify the importance of
the online community in participants' lives because they acknowledge that significant events
occur both online and in person.

**Multi-format Content**

Though not as prevalent in the coded data, multi-format content is still an important
aspect to take into consideration for altruistic influencers building community. The 2022
YouTube Culture Trends report highlighted multi-format content as one of the top three
movements of the year (p. 26). The report highlights memes as one way to engage audiences via
multiple formats (YouTube, 2022, p. 29). Besides centering one of their annual events around a
meme, John and Hank Green also express multi-format creativity through their various YouTube
channels, TikTok accounts, Discord channel, podcasts, subscription businesses, and even in-
person meet-ups with events like VidCon. By working across different mediums, they can
connect to their audiences in ways that are meaningful to them and expand their reach in niche
areas. Other altruistic influencers can follow suit by extending their brand across multiple
platforms. This can help them grow their audiences and strengthen loyalty with preexisting fans
(Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Expanding platforms also eliminates the risk of platform
dependency for success as algorithms, consumer preferences, and content policies change over
time. Multi-format content creates a safety net for the influencer while simultaneously casting a
wider net for audience growth and participation.

**Implications**

The length of the Vlogbrothers career suggests that altruistic influencing is a sustainable
career. Even after 15 years on the platform, the Vlogbrothers still follow the trends highlighted in
the 2022 YouTube Culture and Trends Report while simultaneously rejecting regular SMI
business practices. This implies that other SMIs or content creators can also succeed in this area. If the Vlogbrothers were to be compared to a purpose-driven organization, they could be considered the Newman’s Own\(^1\) of altruistic influencers. They can thrive at the highest level and provide value to their followers and beyond. Not all organizations can be purpose-driven, but more and more are implementing CSR into their business plans. Similarly, even if not all SMIs can pattern themselves on the Vlogbrothers, there are important strategies and characteristics that they can model off to introduce altruistic methods into their procedures.

For SMIs wanting to adopt a more altruistic approach, they can focus on our shared humanity. Recognizing interdependence is key for purpose-driven organizations (Dupret & Pultz, 2021) as well as altruistic influencers. Potential altruistic influencers can educate and mobilize their audiences for action. Instead of (or in addition to) promoting followers to buy affiliated products or their merchandise, they can also urge them to donate to NGOs. Altruistic influencers need to provide multiple options for how their communities can help solve problems. This will help them not alienate followers who might not be able to help financially but can contribute in other ways. It is especially important for SMIs in an outrage-fueled media climate to prioritize actionable steps. Hyper-fixating only on the problems of the world, without balancing with initiatives to counter them can heighten compassion fatigue (Kinnick et al., 1996).

For SMIs or philanthropists who want to grow their community, the coding of the Vlogbrothers videos highlights the importance of cultivating an identity-based community. These are not just fair-weather fans, but rather followers who are deeply connected to the core

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\(^1\) Newman’s Own is a food company started by actor Paul Newman with 100% of the profits going to the Newman’s Own Foundation with a mission to “transform the lives of children who face adversity” (Newman’s Own, 2023).
values of the community. This is one aspect that makes altruistic influencers potentially even more powerful than purpose-driven organizations when it comes to philanthropy. Values can be tied to both products and people but parasocial relationships mediate brand and product loyalty (Kim et al., 2021; Labrecque, 2014).

Sharing similar values is only part of how online communities are formed. This research underscores the need to collaborate with the community to further reinforce their identity as members of the fandom. Alongside their mission to “decrease world suck,” the Vlogbrothers encouraged collaborative memes and inside jokes. It is important to note that altruistic influencers still have some overlap with traditional influencers. While coding the Vlogbrothers videos, each were categorized into the topics of education, vlog, humor, song, and Q&A (see Appendix A and Appendix C). These topic correlate with previous research that young people follow SMIs for entertainment, habitual pastime, information seeking, information sharing, trendiness, and companionship (Croes & Bartels, 2021). However, this overlap underscores their accessible nature. Even altruistic influencers tackling can have a tonal balance between playfulness and pensiveness. Collaboration also fosters community and strengthens parasocial relationships because followers are more actively contributing and engaging with the influencer and fellow fans instead of just passively consuming content.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to better understand altruistic influencers. This study used a grounded theory approach examining the most popular videos of Vlogbrothers channel over the past 15 years to better understand the characteristics of altruistic influencers and how they create and then mobilize their communities for good. Through constant comparative analysis, the
research questions were answered, and several themes emerged surrounding shared humanity, education, and community.

The findings of this study support previous SMI research that suggests influencers create a community by building relationships based on shared values, interests, and identity. It elaborates on the importance of SMIs educating their audience on topics in an accessible or entertaining way so that their followers will understand enough about an issue to desire to be involved and take action. This community is then more easily mobilized to take action towards positive change through collaborative projects and the opportunity to be involved at a level they are comfortable engaging in.

This study highlights important characteristics that help separate altruistic influencers from more traditional SMIs. Altruistic influencers do not use their charity endeavors for exploitative reasons, balance their content in both tone and topic and focus on actionable solutions. They also overlap with other influencers by building a community through shared interests, maintaining a consistent structure of posting, dynamically adjusting their approach over time, and collaborating with their fandom to further strengthen parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships strengthen fan loyalty and the desire to participate in the online community and projects related to the fandom.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the strategies used by influencers to create a positive impact on their community. After more than 15 years in the influencer sphere, the Vlogbrothers demonstrate tonal balance and flexibility in changing tactics. They tackle serious topics but also leave room for lighthearted entertainment. Their values are built into their content. They acknowledge, and even celebrate the complexity of life. This balance is essential for keeping up parasocial relationships and maintaining momentum for their charitable
endeavors without alienating their audience. This study further reinforces the Vlogbrothers’ impact in online culture as they embody the altruistic influencer, and their long career suggests that altruistic influencing is sustainable when done with these characteristics. However, it is worth recognizing that they still run a business and have several flows of income as influencers. Even so, they have turned the traditional business model of SMIs on its head and made huge impacts in the nonprofit world through their philanthropy.

Although an appropriate sampling method was utilized for this study, the overall sample of 30 videos is relatively small. Influencers’ empires often span various channels and platforms, and this study only focused on the top videos of one channel. The Vlogbrothers are outliers in the SMI sphere, but as this study shows, they utilize important strategies others can adopt. This study highlighted the importance of multi-format, multi-platform strategies for SMIs, yet this approach was beyond the scope of this project. Future studies could use content analyses of whole channels, multiple channels, or even someone’s entire online media presence for a more comprehensive examination of altruistic influencers’ characteristics and community-building practices. However, this study is the first of its kind to define and explore the concept of an “altruistic influencer” and thus there is an opportunity to inspect this type of SMI and their effects on communities and social problems. Future studies can build on this concept as it intersects with CSR, purpose-driven organizations, and social media research.
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Table 1

Master List

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<th>Host</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<td>John Green</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Dr Pepper Enthusiast John Green Taste Tests Dr Pepper and Its Misbegotten Pretenders</td>
<td>6:21</td>
<td>899,211</td>
<td>John Green</td>
<td>Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>How We Fix the Climate</td>
<td>16:19</td>
<td>575,345</td>
<td>Hank Green</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In 1990 I Made a Bunch of Predictions About 2020...Here they Are</td>
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<td>2,105,481</td>
<td>Hank Green</td>
<td>Vlog</td>
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<td>6,522,045</td>
<td>Hank Green</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>What /Actually/ Happened at Chernobyl</td>
<td>13:33</td>
<td>2,380,444</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Amazon isn't &quot;Burning&quot; - It's Being Burned</td>
<td>7:32</td>
<td>1,380,655</td>
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<td>5 Songs You've Never Heard That You've Heard 1000 Times</td>
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<td>4,149,216</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We just had our first interstellar visitor...and it's weird.</td>
<td>10:18</td>
<td>1,548,820</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>Some Rough Advice for the &quot;Real World&quot;</td>
<td>3:48</td>
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<td>969,400</td>
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<td>Why We Left Buzzfeed (Some Thoughts on Taking Risks)</td>
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<td>4,419,216</td>
<td>Just Between Us</td>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<td>Category</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Understanding Ukraine: The Problems Today and Some Historical Context</td>
<td>6:59</td>
<td>5,124,042</td>
<td>John Green</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Question Tuesday with Cara Delevingne of Paper Towns</td>
<td>3:47</td>
<td>3,051,837</td>
<td>John + Cara Delevingne</td>
<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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<td>53 Terrible Jokes!</td>
<td>4:00</td>
<td>4,503,292</td>
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<td>Humor</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Human Sexuality is Complicated...</td>
<td>3:49</td>
<td>3,155,024</td>
<td>Hank Green</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Tumblr: The Musical</td>
<td>3:58</td>
<td>2,779,103</td>
<td>Hank + AVbyte</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>3,999,925</td>
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<td>Vlog</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Honey Badgers: The Crazy Truth</td>
<td>2:56</td>
<td>3,820,553</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Top 10 Animal POWER MOVES</td>
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<td>10,832,927</td>
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<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Squirrel Attack!</td>
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<td>Hank Green</td>
<td>Song</td>
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<td></td>
<td>50 Jokes (Yes...actually 50 jokes)</td>
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<td>3,589,103</td>
<td>Hank Green</td>
<td>Humor</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2,042,659</td>
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<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>3:24</td>
<td>1,109,378</td>
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<td>Vlog</td>
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### Appendix B

#### Table 2

*Education vs Non-Educational Video Duration*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Educational Videos</th>
<th>Educational Videos</th>
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<td><strong>Video</strong></td>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Pepper Enthusiast John Green Taste Tests Dr Pepper and Its Misbegotten Pretenders</td>
<td>6:21</td>
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<tr>
<td>In 1990 I Made a Bunch of Predictions About 2020...Here they Are</td>
<td>3:54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some Rough Advice for the &quot;Real World&quot;</td>
<td>3:48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why We Left Buzzfeed (Some Thoughts on Taking Risks)</td>
<td>4:28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Tuesday with Cara Delevingne of Paper Towns</td>
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<tr>
<td>53 Terrible Jokes!</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats Mating</td>
<td>3:56</td>
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<td>Giraffe Love and Other Questions ANSWERED</td>
<td>2:53</td>
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<td>Squirrel Attack!</td>
<td>4:00</td>
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<td>50 Jokes (Yes...actually 50 jokes)</td>
<td>3:59</td>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accio Deathly Hallows</td>
<td>3:54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding Ukraine: The Problems Today and Some Historical Context</td>
<td>6:59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Are American Health Care Costs So High?</td>
<td>7:53</td>
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<td>Human Sexuality is Complicated...</td>
<td>3:49</td>
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<td>Honey Badgers: The Crazy Truth</td>
<td>2:56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Top 10 Animal POWER MOVES</td>
<td>3:45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giraffe Sex: A Terrifying Introduction to Nature at Work (and Play)</td>
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<td>Average</td>
<td>3:38</td>
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<td>Average</td>
<td>7:10</td>
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Appendix C

Figure 1

*Topic of Coded Vlogbrothers Videos*

**Count of Topic**

- **Song**: 9.4%
- **Q&A**: 9.4%
- **Vlog**: 15.6%
- **Humor**: 9.4%
- **Education**: 56.3%