
YOLO as an Embodiment of Society's Simplification

“The Motto,” as Drake so eloquently put it, is “You only live once,” better known as “YOLO. ” This single phrase has become much more than just a catchy chorus in another Drake hit. It has become a way of life, a justification, an ideology, a myth. Prior to the release of rap sensation Drake’s chart topping hit “The Motto” in November 2011 the phrase YOLO was not at all popular among the teen and young adult populations. However following the airing of the music video in February 2012, the slogan became engrained in the teen repertoire.

Celebrities, teenagers, young adults, and even some adults began using the phrase in their everyday conversations. This became most evident by way of social media. Social networking, a huge mythological beast in its own, became the primary tool for communicating the sentiment that is YOLO. More and more status updates, tweets, and blog posts began including the acronym which was being used to describe certain situations. A trend began to emerge. A majority of the situations that are described with the hashtag YOLO are not just once in a lifetime occurrences that can be described by the phrase ‘you only live once’ however, these situations tend to be risky behaviors that really should not be taken part in.

In reality, YOLO has become an excuse or justification for doing something stupid. Now the original context of the phrase within the song, does not seek to endorse participation in foolish activities. Drake asserts YOLO as the motto for the way he and his colleagues, such as Lil Wayne, are supposed to be living. Basically getting money and doing whatever they please is the way that it is supposed to go. This idea however, when translated to the masses has been warped. YOLO as the cultural myth that is has become, allows people to see how it is that the celebrities are living and also imposes that lifestyle onto the people. But because the lifestyle of getting and spending large amounts of money is not often feasible for the masses, they must settle for taking part in more common activities of thoughtlessness. These thoughtless activities equate to status updates of going out, getting drunk and acting crazy, with the hashtag YOLO of course.

The maxim ‘you only live once’ has been around for ages; the idea behind it is not something that is new. Carpe Diem, meaning seize the day, has been around for hundreds of years, and it has the same implications. Throughout the twentieth century even there can be seen examples within popular culture of notions about living in the moment. YOLO however, takes things a step further than all the rest. It is especially representative of this generation of adolescents because of the acronym. Saying you only live once repeatedly to describe situations, is not the same as saying YOLO. It has become a word in itself; its own distinctive sign. This sign communicates the ideas of popular culture.

Why is it that it was necessary for the relatively short phrase to be shortened even more into an acronym? That is a good question, which can be answered by taking a look at the mass culture of this young generation. Everything now a day has to be fast paced, easy, and cool. With all of the technological advances with smart phones and tablets and everything else, people have become use to moving fast and things being simple. YOLO embodies this simplification of society. It is not simple enough to say you only live once; it must be turned into a catchy slogan that rhymes. Through the constant posting and re-tweeting of posts with this hashtag, the idea

of simplification is constantly being spread within the masses.

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