

Original Article

Competitive Signalling and Visible Platform Indicators in Music Rivalry: A Comparative YouTube Case Study of Drake's "Family Matters" and Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us"

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Abstract - Prominent musicians increasingly conduct rivalry through official platform artifacts whose public counters any observer can see, yet management research has rarely examined such episodes as competitive signalling within a governed platform infrastructure. This study compares the two official YouTube videos at the centre of the 2024 confrontation between Drake and Kendrick Lamar, "Family Matters" and "Not Like Us," to describe how the artifacts differ in competitive-signalling configuration and in visible platform indicators, and to interpret the contrast theoretically without causal attribution. The design is a theory-guided comparative artifact analysis of two theoretically selected contrasting cases within one rivalry episode, combining exploratory single-coder analysis of lyrics, documented thumbnail and artwork elements, and platform presentation with descriptive analysis of public counters frozen on 19 July 2026. At capture, "Not Like Us" recorded approximately 9.6 times the cumulative views of "Family Matters," while "Family Matters" recorded higher approximate like and comment rates per 1,000 views. The principal contribution is a transparent, evidence-bounded comparative procedure showing that circulation breadth and visible interaction density are distinct, non-equivalent descriptive dimensions. The two-case design, abbreviated counters, and single capture date bound all inferences.

Keywords - Competitive Dynamics, Competitive Signalling, Music Rivalry, Platformed Attention, Youtube.

1. Introduction

Competitive communication in cultural markets now unfolds on platforms that do more than distribute creative products. Platforms host observable competitive moves and countermoves, structure which artifacts become publicly visible, display cumulative counters beside artifacts, and govern recommendation, monetisation, and circulation through rules the competitors do not control. [1] Competitive dynamics research has long treated competition as a sequence of observable, interdependent moves whose timing, targeting, and intensity can be described systematically [2], and platform research shows that competitive behaviour in digital markets follows platform-specific logics rather than the logics of traditional product rivalry. [3] Together these conditions convert artistic artifacts released on platforms into publicly countable strategic communications, which changes how competition among cultural producers can be studied.

Prominent musicians occupy a distinctive position within these markets. They operate simultaneously as cultural producers, as human brands to which audiences form documented attachments [4], and as strategic communicators whose public conduct is associated with the market standing of their brands. [5] In periods of open rivalry, competitive songs and videos may function as countermoves within an ongoing exchange and as bundles of signals: claims about skill, standing, and cultural membership directed at opponents, audiences, and industry intermediaries under asymmetric information. [6] In hip-hop, authenticity supplies much of that signal content, because claims to credibility and cultural belonging are intensely policed and accusations of inauthenticity operate as attacks on standing. [7] Not

every music video is a strategic signal, and visibility establishes nothing about reception; the narrower claim here is that officially released rivalry artifacts can be read as competitive communications whose content and public indicators admit disciplined description.

Describing those indicators requires care, because each public counter has a limited meaning. Platform counters are digital traces, naturally occurring records of platform activity rather than instruments designed for research. [8,9] Cumulative recorded views register circulation events, not unique viewers. Visible likes record one kind of platform action and visible comments another, and neither reveals motivation or sentiment. Like and comment counters are displayed in abbreviated form, so their numerical precision is limited. Counters also cannot by themselves establish what produced them, although observable video-content characteristics may be associated with public interaction indicators on YouTube. [10] One distinction organises this study's measurement: circulation breadth, recorded as cumulative views, and interaction density, recorded as visible likes and visible comments per 1,000 views, are different dimensions of an artifact's platform record, and standing on one does not entail standing on the other. This motivates the study's three indicators: cumulative recorded views, likes per 1,000 views, and comments per 1,000 views.

The empirical setting is the 2024 confrontation between Drake and Kendrick Lamar, which produced a rapid sequence of publicly distributed competitive recordings and official audiovisual artifacts, and which has begun to attract scholarly attention as a contest over authenticity standards and celebrity masculinity before online audiences. [11] Two artifacts are selected: Drake's official "Family Matters" video and Kendrick Lamar's official "Not Like Us" video. They form an analytically useful comparison because both belong to the same rivalry episode, both are official artist-channel artifacts, both contain direct competitive communication aimed at the other artist, both accumulated substantial public visibility, and they display contrasting content structures. They are not matched artifacts: their release histories differ, and they are treated throughout as theoretically selected contrasting cases rather than equivalent treatments.

The research problem sits at the intersection of individually well-developed literatures. Competitive dynamics, signalling, authenticity, human-brand, and platform scholarship each account well for their own objects, but they remain insufficiently integrated for examining how rival musical artifacts combine competitive content design with publicly visible platform indicators. Three deficiencies are specific. Theoretically, competitive dynamics explains moves and countermoves but does not fully specify the symbolic signals embedded in cultural artifacts, which its firm-centered settings rarely require. [2] In platform measurement, visible counters are often discussed as indicators of an artifact's standing without adequate separation between cumulative circulation and interaction density, although the two record different public actions at different display precision. [1] And evidentially, small comparative platform studies can blur what was measured, what was interpretively coded, what was documentary context, and what remains an untested proposition, a separation digital-trace methodology treats as necessary for defensible claims. [8]

The purpose of this study is to compare the competitive-signalling configurations and publicly visible platform indicators of "Family Matters" and "Not Like Us" and to interpret their observed configuration through competitive dynamics, signalling, authenticity, and platformed-attention perspectives without causal attribution. The analytical position follows. The study is descriptive and comparative; the cases are theoretically selected; content features are coded against predefined theory-derived categories; public counters are measured from a frozen, provenance-documented capture; contextual conditions are documented rather than modelled; and the analysis examines configurations rather than causal relationships. The study's central descriptive claim is correspondingly bounded: platform-mediated music rivalry produces contrasting competitive-signalling configurations, while circulation breadth and interaction density constitute non-equivalent descriptive dimensions of the platform record.

Three research questions structure the study. RQ1: how do "Family Matters" and "Not Like Us" differ in their competitive-signalling configurations, including attack concentration, narrative structure, identity and authenticity framing, participatory design features, and documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism? RQ2: how do the two official videos differ in cumulative recorded views, visible likes per 1,000 views, and visible comments per 1,000 views at the verified capture date, subject to the documented precision of the public counters? RQ3: how can the observed

content and platform-indicator configurations be interpreted, without causal attribution, through competitive dynamics, signalling, and platformed-attention perspectives?

Three contributions are claimed, each proportional to a descriptive two-case design. Theoretically, the study integrates competitive dynamics, signalling and authenticity, and platformed attention to interpret music-rivalry artifacts as competitive communications within a governed platform environment; the study integrates established theoretical perspectives for an analytically bounded interpretation and reserves testing for future designs. Analytically, it separates content configuration, cumulative recorded circulation, visible interaction density, and contextual conditions, a separation that prevents platform counters from being treated as interchangeable indicators of an artifact's standing. Methodologically, it separates coded competitive communication from publicly visible indicators of circulation and interaction within a bounded two-case music-rivalry comparison, implemented through frozen-date capture, transparent formulas, explicit counter-precision notes, five separated evidence classes, and rival-explanation discipline.

The study's boundaries are stated plainly. It examines two cases from one rivalry episode on one platform at one frozen capture date; the artifacts' release histories are non-equivalent; the qualitative interpretation is exploratory; the design supports descriptive comparison rather than causal estimation; and the measured evidence consists of platform counters and coded artifact features, while audience sentiment and brand equity fall outside the research design. The article proceeds through the theoretical foundation, the conceptual framework, the methodology, the findings, the discussion with implications, the limitations, and the conclusion.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

2.1. *Competitive Dynamics and Rivalry*

Competitive dynamics is the study of observable moves and countermoves among actors who recognise one another as competitors, together with the conditions under which actions provoke, delay, or deter responses. [2,12] The perspective supplies this study's basic temporal and relational architecture. A rivalry episode can be decomposed into an initial move, a countermove, the targeting of each action, the sequence of responses, the concentration of attack across one or several targets, the competitive positioning claimed in each action, and the escalation profile of the exchange. Applied to the present cases, the perspective identifies each official video as a move within one documented rivalry episode, supports the coding of response structure and attack concentration, provides a vocabulary for interpreting direct single-target and distributed multi-target competitive action, and clarifies why the timing and sequencing of the two artifacts belong in the analysis rather than in a footnote.

Rivalry research sharpens the account by distinguishing rivalry from ordinary impersonal competition: rivalry is relational, personalised, and historically embedded, and repeated confrontation between familiar opponents intensifies competitive behaviour and observer interest beyond what objective stakes explain. [13] Perceived competitive tension between paired rivals further raises the likelihood of attack and response, which supports reading each artifact as a move within one escalating exchange. [14] Two boundaries govern the use of this pillar. The theory is applied analytically at the level of strategic action, and the shift from firms to prominent cultural actors is acknowledged rather than assumed away; nothing in the framework treats artists and firms as identical units, and the framework refrains from claiming that competitive-dynamics theory predicts platform counters. Its limitation is equally definite: competitive dynamics explains the structure and sequence of rivalry but does not by itself explain the symbolic, cultural, identity, and reputational content communicated through artistic artifacts.

2.2. *Competitive Signalling*

Signalling theory explains how actors communicate information about qualities that are not directly observable under conditions of information asymmetry, and how the cost and design of a signal bear on its credibility. [6,15] Read through this lens, a competitive music video is a dense signalling artifact. It may carry credibility signals, artistic-skill signals, resilience signals, cultural-membership signals, market-position signals, and explicit authenticity claims, alongside delegitimation counter-signals aimed at degrading the opponent's claims; each of these can be directed simultaneously at the opponent and at watching audiences and intermediaries. The signalling anatomy applied in

coding distinguishes the signaller, the signal, the intended receiver, the claimed quality, the observable cost of transmission, the credibility basis, any counter-signal, and the public display of reception that the platform attaches to the artifact.

Two disciplines restrain this pillar. First, production effort or expense does not make a claim credible, and a lyrical or visual claim is never treated as believed merely because it was costly to produce. Second, platform counters record visible circulation and visible interaction; they do not record signal acceptance. [6,16] Within these limits, signalling theory directly informs the coding categories for competitive positioning, human-brand signalling, authenticity framing, identity construction, reputational framing, and documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism. Signalling theory does not, however, explain the culturally specific meaning of authenticity in hip-hop, nor how platform infrastructures distribute and quantify the visibility of signals.

2.3. Authenticity and Identity in Hip-Hop Competition

In hip-hop, authenticity operates as a culturally specific form of legitimacy and, for this study, as signal content rather than a separate theory. Authenticity disputes concern cultural membership, regional belonging, artistic credibility, personal history, commercial positioning, the policing of insider and outsider boundaries, and the consistency between an artist's claimed identity and perceived practice. [7] Because these claims are policed intensely within the genre, accusations of inauthenticity function as competitive delegitimation strategies inside the texts themselves: an artifact can attack an opponent's standing by disputing his membership or his consistency as effectively as by disputing his skill. Authenticity is treated throughout as a socially constructed and continually renegotiated attribution rather than an intrinsic property, which is why it is coded only as claims advanced within the artifacts. [17]

The selected episode has been read in precisely these terms. Gamble [11] examines the Kendrick Lamar and Drake feud as a contest conducted before online audiences in which standards of authenticity, respectability, and celebrity masculinity after #MeToo were themselves at stake, which establishes the episode's scholarly standing without supplying any platform-metric or management finding. For coding, the authenticity literature grounds the distinctions between individual and collective framing, insider and outsider construction, regional identity, cultural authority, legitimacy claims, and reputational delegitimation. Its limitation is structural: authenticity scholarship explains the cultural meaning of legitimacy claims, but it does not explain how a platform transforms those claims into publicly visible, numerically displayed traces.

2.4. Platformed Attention and Visible Interaction

The third pillar begins from attention scarcity: in information-rich environments, audience attention is the binding scarce resource, and visibility is competitively valuable. [18] Platform scholarship adds that visibility on contemporary platforms is infrastructurally organised rather than purely organic; interfaces, recommendation systems, and governance rules decide what circulates and how circulation is displayed. [1,19] On YouTube specifically, recommendation and ranking systems organise what becomes visible into platform-specific ranking cultures, and algorithmically mediated channels shape how music is reached and consumed. [20,21] Market-level work completes the environment: competitive behaviour in digital markets follows platform-specific logics [3,22], platform design and revenue-sharing shape how creators participate and how attention concentrates among them [23], and tiered governance and demonetisation rules condition the compensation and exposure attached to content. [24] An official rivalry video therefore circulates through a governed environment whose reward structures the artists do not control.

Within that environment, YouTube counters are platform-produced public traces, and the five quantities used in this study must be kept strictly distinct: cumulative recorded views, visible likes, visible comments, likes per 1,000 views, and comments per 1,000 views. Cumulative views indicate recorded circulation and do not identify unique viewers. Likes and comments represent different visible actions, and both counters may be displayed in abbreviated form, which constrains the numerical precision of any rate computed from them. Public counters record visible platform actions rather than user motivation, and a comment count in particular does not indicate positive sentiment, since commenting can express approval, criticism, humour, or dispute. High interaction density is not equivalent to high cumulative

circulation, and the platform's display conventions set the outer limit of measurement precision for any external observer.

Two further strands discipline the pillar's use. Research on YouTube video characteristics supports the limited proposition that observable content features may be associated with public platform indicators, without establishing that any feature causes any counter. [10] And digital-trace methodology treats platform counters as found data whose properties must be documented rather than assumed, which is why capture provenance and display precision carry analytical weight in this design. [8] Experimental evidence from artificial cultural markets reinforces the same restraint, because success in cultural markets is strongly path-dependent and only weakly predictable from content characteristics alone. [25] Platform-attention scholarship explains visible distribution and public measurement while leaving the production of the counter configurations unexplained, so the comparison that follows is descriptive.

2.5. Music Artists as Human Brands in Platform Markets

A concise contextual literature explains why the stakes of such contests are managerial and not only cultural. Prominent individuals can function as human brands to which audiences form strong attachments [4], and contemporary artists operate simultaneously as cultural producers, commercial identities, public personas, platform-dependent creators, and strategic communicators inside the platform-governed production conditions documented for the cultural industries. [26] The platformisation of cultural production makes such artists structurally dependent on platform infrastructures for the distribution and monetisation of their work. [27] Rivalry artifacts consequently carry reputational and identity implications for the artists and organisational-risk and governance implications for the labels and platforms that promote and host them.

Evidence on musicians' self-presentation supports this contextual role in associational terms: impression management through social media is related to the market performance of musicians' human brands [5], which indicates that publicly visible conduct of the kind studied here belongs to human-brand management, without licensing any transfer of that finding to the two rivalry videos. Perceived authenticity likewise contributes to the evaluation of human brands, and social-media activity has been associated with music-market outcomes, which situates rivalry conduct within human-brand management without measuring any such outcome here. [28,29] The boundary of this literature in the present study is strict: human-brand attachment, brand equity, market value, sales, earnings, and loyalty remain unmeasured, and such outcomes sit outside the framework. Human-brand scholarship contextualises why strategic rivalry artifacts matter; it does not supply the study's operative constructs.

2.6. Empirical and Analytical Gap

Four linked gaps define the study's position. The first is theoretical fragmentation. Competitive dynamics explains moves and countermoves, signalling and authenticity explain communicated qualities, identity claims, and delegitimation, and platform scholarship explains governed visibility and public counters, but these streams are seldom integrated within a bounded analysis of rival official music-video artifacts, and the intersection remains theoretically fragmented rather than empty. The second is construct conflation. Public discussion and parts of the research literature can treat views, likes, comments, reach, and popularity as interchangeable indicators of an artifact's standing, whereas the present design requires a sharper distinction among circulation breadth, visible like density, and visible comment density; that distinction remains underdeveloped in the specific setting of two-case platform rivalry analysis.

The third gap is evidentiary blurring. Small digital-platform studies can fail to distinguish adequately among directly measured counters, interpretively coded artifact features, documentary context, and untested theoretical propositions, and the distinction is decisive here because the design involves one capture date, abbreviated counters, single-coder interpretation, and non-equivalent release histories. The fourth gap is case-specific. The selected rivalry has received commentary and initial scholarly attention, but limited management-oriented analysis has combined competitive content configuration, visible YouTube indicators, explicit precision constraints, systematic rival explanations, and non-causal theoretical interpretation in one design. An underdeveloped intersection therefore remains

between competitive-rivalry theory, signalling and authenticity analysis, and platform-based measurement of visible circulation and interaction within theoretically selected music-rivalry artifacts.

2.7. Theoretical Integration

The pillars combine into one analytical sequence. A rivalry episode generates observable strategic moves and countermoves; each artifact embodies a competitive-signalling configuration comprising attack concentration, narrative structure, identity and authenticity framing, participatory design features, and documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism; the artifacts circulate through a platform-governed environment; and the platform records cumulative views and displays visible likes and comments. The content configurations are compared alongside, not treated as causes of, the platform indicators, while release timing, prior audio circulation, live performance, media exposure, audience communities, recommendation exposure, and cross-platform promotion remain boundary conditions and rival explanations. The theories complement one another at defined points: competitive dynamics supplies the relational sequence, signalling supplies the communicative content, authenticity supplies the cultural credibility stakes, and platformed attention supplies the conditions of visibility and public measurement. Every link in the sequence is a site of description; none carries an estimated relationship, and the design supports analytical interpretation and future propositions rather than causal estimation.

Three post-analysis sensitising propositions for future multi-case testing arise from this integration; they were not preregistered, were formulated after the descriptive comparison reported later, are not hypotheses tested by the present cases, and each requires multi-episode designs with longitudinal captures and controls for release timing, prior circulation, and artist- and platform-level context. The propositions are stated in full in Section 6.5.

3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the study's analytical framework, which integrates the three theoretical pillars established in Section 2, each with a distinct function. Competitive dynamics and rivalry supply the episode: a bounded sequence of recognised moves and countermoves within which the two artifacts were produced. [2,13] Signalling and authenticity supply the content categories through which each artifact's competitive communication is coded. [6,7] Platformed attention supplies the measurement conditions under which the platform records circulation and displays visible interaction. [1] The framework is a conceptual organisation for an evidence-bounded comparison, not a causal or predictive model.

The competitive-signalling configuration is the combined pattern coded from each artifact across five dimensions. Attack concentration records how critical address is distributed across targets. Narrative structure records the artifact's formal organisation, from multi-part argument to repeatable chorus design. Identity and authenticity framing records individual against collective self-definition and the legitimacy claims and accusations advanced in the text. Participatory design features record content properties built for repetition, performance, or scrutiny. Documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism records competitively meaningful visual elements, coded from documented visual materials. These dimensions are coded descriptive categories, and every dimension carries a purely descriptive role within the framework.

The visible platform indicators are three: cumulative recorded views, visible likes per 1,000 views, and visible comments per 1,000 views, all recorded from the verified frozen capture of 19 July 2026. Their evidentiary limits are part of their definition. Views record circulation events rather than unique viewers; likes and comments record two different visible actions whose counters are displayed in abbreviated form; and the indicators leave sentiment, loyalty, motivation, and commercial standing unmeasured. [8] Research on YouTube supports treating observable content characteristics and public indicators as potentially associated, and nothing stronger. [10]

Figure 1 organises the framework in four tiers. The theoretical lenses frame the rivalry sequence, guide the coding of identity, credibility, and legitimacy claims, and define the visibility environment within which public counters acquire meaning; the bounded competitive context situates the two selected official video-associated platform artifact records; the coded competitive-signalling configuration and the visible platform indicators stand as parallel evidence domains,

the first comprising coded evidence and the second comprising measured public traces, joined through a plain connector drawn without arrowheads that records descriptive comparison without causal estimation; and the documentary boundary conditions constrain interpretation as rival explanations. Beneath the comparison stand the documentary boundary conditions, factors plausibly associated with the observed indicator differences that a two-case design can document but cannot model or control: prior audio circulation, release timing and video age, video duration and content format, live-performance exposure, news and awards-related amplification, cross-platform promotion, existing audience communities, recommendation-system exposure, repeat viewing, and possible unobserved paid promotion. These conditions are retained as rival explanations rather than as modelled variables. The framework therefore guides the separate coding of artifact characteristics, the measurement of visible platform indicators, the documentation of rival explanations, and the non-causal integration of the two evidence domains in the sections that follow.

Six terms carry fixed definitions throughout. The competitive rivalry episode is the bounded sequence of recognised moves and countermoves between the competing actors within the documented 2024 musical confrontation. The competitive-signalling configuration is the combined pattern of attack concentration, narrative structure, identity and authenticity framing, participatory design features, and documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism coded from each artifact. Cumulative recorded views are the platform-displayed total number of recorded video views at the verified capture date, which does not represent unique viewers. Visible likes per 1,000 views are the displayed like counter divided by cumulative recorded views and multiplied by 1,000, subject to the precision of the platform display, and visible comments per 1,000 views are defined analogously from the displayed comment counter. Documentary boundary conditions are contextual factors plausibly associated with the observed platform-indicator differences but not estimated or controlled in the two-case design. Visible interaction is never defined as psychological engagement, a construct that sits outside the present indicators.

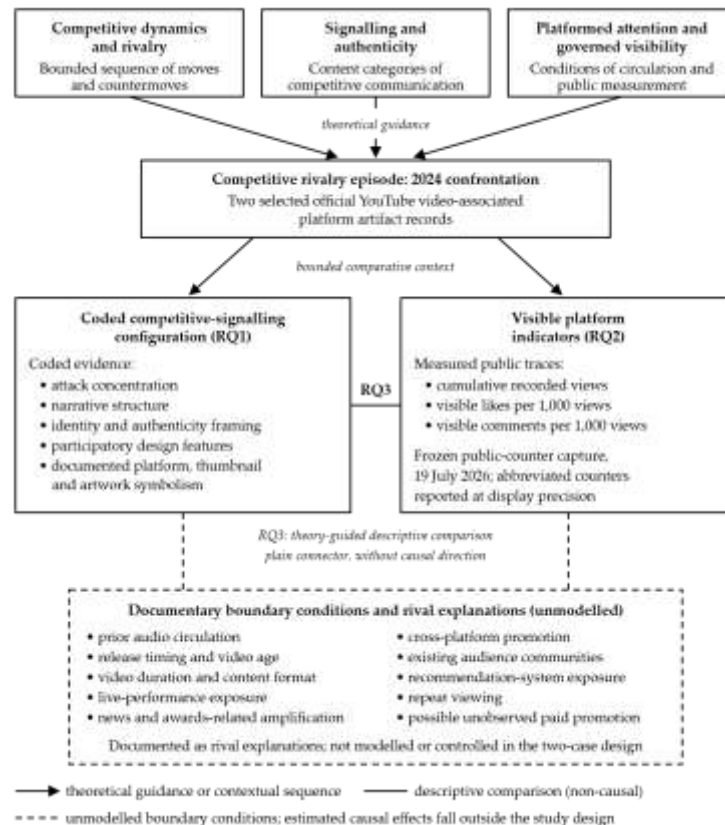


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework For The Descriptive Comparison Of Competitive Signalling And Visible Platform Indicators

Note: The framework distinguishes the theoretical lenses, bounded competitive context, principal evidence domains, and documentary boundary conditions used in the study. Solid arrows indicate theoretical guidance or contextual sequence. The plain connector between the coded competitive-signalling configuration and visible platform indicators represents descriptive comparison without causal direction. Dashed lines and borders identify unmodelled boundary conditions and rival explanations. Estimated causal relationships fall outside the study design.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Research Design

The study was designed as a theory-guided comparative artifact analysis embedded within a bounded rivalry episode, combining public digital traces, qualitative artifact analysis, and documentary contextual evidence. [30] The design fits the research questions directly: RQ1 requires qualitative interpretation of the artifacts' content, RQ2 requires descriptive calculation from frozen platform records, and RQ3 requires theoretical interpretation within a bounded comparative context supporting analytical rather than statistical generalisation. Four components were combined: theory-guided coding of competitive-signalling features; descriptive analysis of frozen public platform indicators, which are digital traces whose properties must be documented rather than assumed [8,9]; documentary analysis of contextual boundary conditions; and non-causal theoretical integration. The study is not an experiment, survey, matched-case design, sentiment analysis, or audience-reception study.

4.2. Case Selection and Comparative Logic

The two artifacts were purposively and theoretically selected: both belong to the same documented rivalry episode, both were published through official artist-controlled channels, both constitute prominent competitive communications that directly address the rivalry, both contain analysable lyrical, narrative, identity, participatory, and visual elements, and both display public counters. The cases were selected for theoretical contrast within a common rivalry episode, not for equivalence on exposure conditions, and they are contrasting rather than matched cases. Their principal differences are documented rather than controlled: release and premiere timing, prior audio circulation, video age at capture, duration, narrative format, performance history, external amplification, possible recommendation-system exposure, and audience-community differences. These are treated as boundary conditions and rival explanations throughout; comparing the two artifacts controls for none of them.

4.3. Units of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis was the official video-associated platform artifact record for each selected track, comprising the documented lyrical content, the official title, the channel identity, the thumbnail or cover presentation, the description-panel information, and the publicly displayed video-level platform counters recorded at the verified frozen capture date. Four unit roles are distinguished. The unit of selection was the official video release, one per artist, analysed through its platform artifact record. The units of coding were the predefined lyrical segments, song sections, repeated phrases, narrative episodes, documented thumbnail and artwork elements, and identity claims. The unit of measurement was the video-level public platform counter. The units of contextual documentation were the release chronology, prior circulation, performance history, media and awards-related amplification, litigation record, and related boundary conditions. Artist, channel, video, and counter were never conflated as a single unit.

4.4. Data Sources and Capture Provenance

The source categories were the official watch and channel pages, frozen screenshots of both, description-panel information, the displayed view, like, and comment counters, official credits documentation, documented lyrics used only for paraphrased coding [31,32], release-date documentation, documentary contextual records, and federal court records for the retained legal-risk context. Verified platform details are: Drake, channel @DrakeOfficial, video titled "FAMILY MATTERS," duration 7 minutes 37 seconds from the captured player bar; and Kendrick Lamar, channel @kendricklamar, video titled "Not Like Us," duration 5 minutes 55 seconds, recorded from a dated supplementary platform capture of 20 July 2026, one day after the frozen quantitative capture; duration is a fixed artifact property, and every counter value derives exclusively from the frozen 19 July 2026 capture. The stable URL-based video identifiers of the two artifacts, ZkXG3ZrXlbc for "FAMILY MATTERS" [33] and H58vbez_m4E for "Not Like Us" [34], were verified

against the official channel records; the identifiers designate the artifacts and carry neither counters nor other numerical information.

The capture date of 19 July 2026 is supported by two present documentary anchors, an author-typed date line in the accompanying dated capture document and file metadata recording creation on that date; capture times between 17:58 and 18:06 device local time on 19 July 2026 are recorded in the metadata of five of the six primary screenshots, and device clocks within that window are visible in two captures, so the counters represent a single same-date capture session. Dates are reported per source: industry reporting places the “Family Matters” video on YouTube with its track on 3 May 2024 United States time [35], with the platform-displayed upload date not preserved in the capture; the “Not Like Us” premiere is documented as 4 July 2024 United States time, and the captured panel displays 5 July 2024, consistent with a UTC+3 viewer locale given that premiere timing. The screenshots froze otherwise mutable counters: all calculations use only the frozen values, and the capture date defines the temporal boundary of the quantitative dataset.

4.5. Quantitative Indicators and Calculation Procedures

Three indicators were computed. Cumulative recorded views are the displayed cumulative number of video views visible on the official page at the verified capture date; the description panels displayed full integer values, this figure does not identify unique viewers, and it may include repeat viewing. Visible likes per 1,000 views equal the displayed like count divided by cumulative recorded views, multiplied by 1,000. Visible comments per 1,000 views are defined analogously. The like and comment counters were displayed in abbreviated form, so both rates are approximate; views are reported exactly as displayed, derived rates to one decimal place, and every rate from an abbreviated counter carries the qualifier approximately. The calculations assume nothing about the platform’s rounding or truncation algorithm; the sensitivity analysis reported in the Results states the calculations under alternative plausible display-interval scenarios labelled as assumptions rather than verified platform procedures, and the scenarios support transparency rather than a robustness claim. Like and comment rates are kept separate because the two counters record behaviourally distinct actions, and a descriptive ratio of the two exact view counts is also reported. The quantitative analysis uses descriptive calculations appropriate to two purposively selected artifacts rather than a probabilistic sample.

4.6. Qualitative Coding and Documentary Analysis

The qualitative analysis was theory-guided and primarily deductive. The coding categories were defined before coding from the three theoretical pillars and were applied consistently to the documented evidence for both artifacts; each category carries a conceptual definition, unit of coding, inclusion and exclusion criteria, evidence source, theory connection, and prohibited inference, as set out in this section and in the conceptual framework. [36,37] Five primary categories were coded, matching the conceptual framework: attack concentration, narrative structure, identity and authenticity framing, participatory design features, and documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism, with competitive positioning and reputational framing operationalised as subcategories of the signalling configuration, supported by subordinate indicators such as primary against multiple targets, individual against collective identity, insider against outsider framing, repeated hooks, and location, object, community, and destruction symbolism. Authenticity was coded only as claims, never as an established quality, and lyrical allegations were coded as textual claims whose truth the study does not assess. Lyrics were paraphrased throughout, checked against credits and release documentation, and never reproduced.

Participatory design features are interpreted as properties of the artifacts rather than observed viewer behaviour, and viewer participation remains outside the coded evidence. The coded evidence comprised documented lyrical content, official platform presentation, and selected documented visual materials. Documentary visual-element coding was confined to directly captured or independently documented visual evidence, namely the captured thumbnail, the documented single cover artwork, and production and release facts in documentary records; the available visual evidence comprises captured and independently documented materials rather than a complete timecoded scene record, and the visual analysis is restricted to those directly captured and independently documented materials. The author completed the coding as the sole coder. The quality-assurance procedure relied on the predefined category definitions,

sentence-level checking of every claim against its cited evidence, and the rival-explanation review, and the analysis is presented as an exploratory theory-guided single-coder interpretation, with readings treated as analytically reasoned rather than verified frequencies.

4.7. Analytical Integration

The two evidence domains were integrated through a joint descriptive comparison. For each artifact, the coded configuration, the cumulative recorded views, the two visible interaction rates, and the documented boundary conditions were assembled into one profile, and the analysis asked how the artifacts differ, how their indicator profiles differ, how the configurations can be interpreted through the three pillars, and which rival explanations limit that interpretation. Content characteristics are compared alongside and analytically related to the indicators without causal estimation, and content characteristics and platform indicators remain separate descriptive evidence domains. The sensitising propositions stated in Section 6.5 are not hypotheses tested by the two cases.

4.8. Quality Assurance and Evidence-and-Claim Boundary Protocol

Quality assurance comprised procedures genuinely completed: frozen capture with preserved original screenshots; in-text statement of every calculation formula; independent arithmetic recalculation of every reported figure; sentence-level checking of every claim against its cited evidence; structured review of rival explanations; reference verification; and synchronisation checks between the named and anonymous versions. These support credibility through direct use of official pages, transparent definitions, and recorded alternative interpretations; dependability through the in-text category definitions and reproducible formulas; confirmability through separating observation from interpretation over preserved originals; and transferability through explicit case description and stated boundaries. Documentary records provide contextual corroboration, not methodological triangulation. Every claim is classified as directly measured, qualitatively coded, documentary context, theoretical interpretation, or future proposition, and every claim remains within its assigned class. These rules, together with the non-causal reading of all comparisons, the single-coder limitation, and the counter-precision qualifiers, constitute the study's Evidence and Claim Boundary Protocol; later sections rely on this protocol rather than restating it.

4.9. Ethical and Legal Considerations

The study used publicly accessible platform materials, published artifacts, and public documentary and court records, and proceeded without recruitment, intervention, private data, user-level profiling, comment scraping, or interaction with human participants; formal institutional ethics review was not sought for this form of public-data research, and the author remains responsible for compliance with the applicable institutional and journal requirements. Public availability does not remove ethical responsibility [38]: the manuscript excludes quotations and identifying details from ordinary platform users, personal data are minimised, and allegations are treated with caution. Lyrical content is paraphrased rather than reproduced at length, visual artifacts are described analytically, and screenshots serve as research records, with any publication of platform-interface images subject to the journal's permissions policy; public availability does not create unrestricted reproduction rights. All allegations analysed are identified only as artistic or lyrical allegations; their truth is not assessed, the legal discussion remains descriptive and avoids attributing liability; a procedural ruling on actionability is not read as a factual finding; and the cited legal record carries a stated verification date to be re-checked at submission.

4.10. Data Availability and Reproducibility

The research materials that exist are the frozen screenshot captures of 19 July 2026, the accompanying dated capture documents, the derived platform counters, and the documentary sources cited in the reference list; the coding-category definitions, calculation formulas, and evidence classification are stated in full within the manuscript itself. Because the screenshots contain third-party platform interfaces and the artifacts are copyrighted, availability is restricted accordingly: the derived counters and capture metadata are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, while copyrighted videos and complete lyrics remain with their respective rights holders. Another researcher can reproduce the reported formulas, rates, coding definitions, evidence classification, and case-selection logic from the

manuscript together with those materials; the frozen capture permits reproduction of the reported calculations, not recreation of the platform state at a later date.

5. Results

5.1. Case Provenance and Comparative Boundaries

The two artifacts were selected as theoretically contrasting cases within one rivalry episode, not as matched cases. Drake's "FAMILY MATTERS," on the official channel @DrakeOfficial, appeared on YouTube with its track on 3 May 2024 United States time per contemporaneous industry reporting [35], with a captured duration of 7 minutes 37 seconds; Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us," on the official channel @kendricklamar, followed a track released 4 May 2024 and premiered as an official video on 4 July 2024 United States time [39], with a duration of 5 minutes 55 seconds recorded from a dated supplementary platform capture of 20 July 2026. All platform figures were captured on 19 July 2026, with views displayed exactly and like and comment counters displayed in abbreviated form. The artifacts differ in release timing, prior audio circulation, video age, duration, content structure, live-performance history, external amplification, and possible recommendation-system exposure; these differences are reported here without interpretation and define the boundaries within which the comparison operates. **Table 1** summarises the provenance record.

Table 1: Case provenance and comparative boundaries

Item	"Family Matters"	"Not Like Us"
Artist and official channel	Drake; @DrakeOfficial	Kendrick Lamar; @kendricklamar
Stable video identifier	ZkXG3ZrXlbc (verified, official channel record)	H58vbez_m4E (verified, official channel record)
Release or premiere date	Video on YouTube with the track, 3 May 2024 United States time (industry-documented); platform-displayed upload date not preserved in the capture	Track 4 May 2024; official video premiered 4 July 2024 United States time; captured panel displays 5 July 2024 under a UTC+3 viewer locale
Duration	7 min 37 s (captured player bar)	5 min 55 s (supplementary capture, 20 July 2026)
Capture date	19 July 2026	19 July 2026
Display precision	Views exact; likes and comments abbreviated	Views exact; likes and comments abbreviated
Major boundary condition	Released at the height of the exchange; on the platform approximately two months (62 days) longer at capture	Audio circulated for two months before the video premiere, with documented external amplification in that interval [39]

5.2. Visible Platform Indicators

Table 2 reports the indicators, and every figure was independently recalculated from the frozen capture. "Not Like Us" recorded 486,718,000 cumulative recorded views against 50,892,588 for "Family Matters," a descriptive ratio of approximately 9.6 computed from the two exact view counts. On the displayed counters, "Family Matters" recorded approximately 19.6 visible likes and approximately 3.6 visible comments per 1,000 recorded views, against approximately 15.6 and approximately 0.8 for "Not Like Us." The two view counts are exact as displayed; the like and comment counters were abbreviated displays, so both rates are approximate, are reported to one decimal place, and inherit the display imprecision of their numerators, and the reported ordering of the rates is subject to that precision. These figures answer RQ2: the artifact with the far larger circulation shows the lower visible interaction density on every displayed indicator, and the two dimensions order the artifacts in opposite directions. The Results section reports the numerical comparison, while theoretical interpretation follows in the discussion.

Table 2: Visible Youtube Indicators at the Verified Capture Date

Indicator	"Family Matters"	"Not Like Us"	Precision note
Cumulative recorded views	50,892,588	486,718,000	Exact as displayed in the description panel
Displayed likes	"1M" (approx. 1,000,000)	"7.6M" (approx. 7,600,000)	Abbreviated platform display; exact value unknown
Displayed comments	"185K" (approx. 185,000)	"382K" (approx. 382,000)	Abbreviated platform display; exact value unknown
Visible likes per 1,000 views	approx. 19.6	approx. 15.6	Approximate; one decimal; inherits numerator imprecision
Visible comments per 1,000 views	approx. 3.6	approx. 0.8	Approximate; one decimal; inherits numerator imprecision

Because the platform does not disclose how abbreviated counters are produced, **Table 3** reports the two derived rates under two separately labelled hypothetical display-interval assumptions: a rounding assumption, under which a displayed abbreviated value denotes the nearest displayable value, and a truncation assumption, under which it denotes the displayed value together with any undisplayed remainder. These scenarios are analytical assumptions rather than verified platform procedures, and the analysis claims nothing about the platform's actual display algorithm. Under every stated scenario the ordering of the two artifacts on both rates is unchanged.

Figure 2 displays the indicators as unconnected paired bars in the two dimensions the study distinguishes, circulation breadth and visible interaction density, with like and comment rates shown separately.

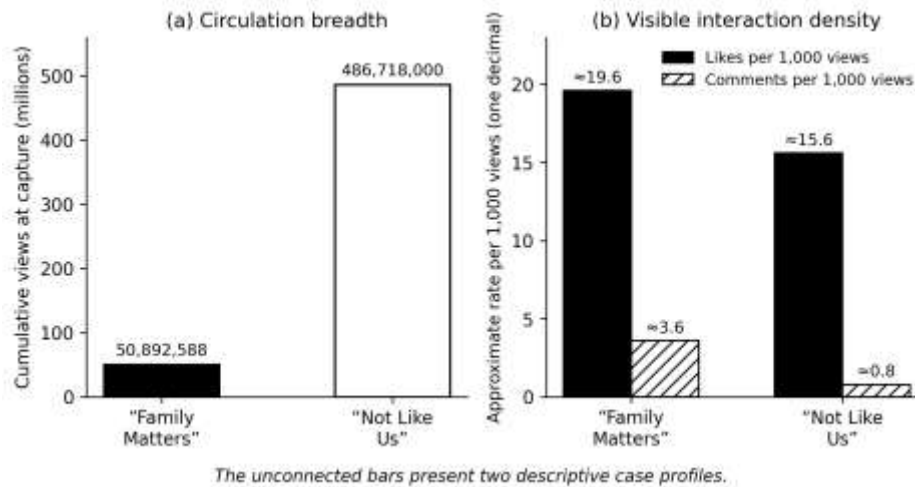


Fig. 2 Visible Platform Indicators of the Two Artifacts, Captured 19 July 2026. Panel (A) Presents Exact Cumulative Recorded Views. Panel (B) Presents Approximate Like and Comment Rates Per 1,000 Views Based on the Displayed Counters. the Unconnected Bars Present Two Descriptive Case Profiles

Table 3: Sensitivity of the Approximate Rates Under Labelled Display-Interval Assumptions

Approximate rate (per 1,000 views)	Hypothetical rounding assumption	Hypothetical truncation assumption	Ordering of the two artifacts
"Family Matters" visible likes	≈ 18.7 to 20.6	≈ 19.6 to 21.6	Higher than "Not Like Us" in all scenarios
"Not Like Us" visible likes	≈ 15.5 to 15.7	≈ 15.6 to 15.8	Lower than "Family Matters" in all scenarios

"Family Matters" visible comments	≈ 3.6	≈ 3.6 to 3.7	Higher than "Not Like Us" in all scenarios
"Not Like Us" visible comments	≈ 0.8	≈ 0.8	Lower than "Family Matters" in all scenarios

5.3. Competitive-Signalling Configuration

The coded comparison is organised around the five framework dimensions, with competitive positioning and reputational framing reported as subordinate elements. Each dimension below states the comparison and the evidence for each artifact; the evidence source and evidentiary limitation of every dimension are stated in **Table 4**, and theoretical interpretation is reserved for the discussion. Table 4 summarises the configuration comparison. All observations are single-coder readings against the predefined theory-derived categories, and every allegation named is an artistic claim made within an artifact, with its truth not evaluated.

Attack concentration compares how critical address is distributed. "Family Matters" addresses multiple targets, the primary opponent together with several other artists and one label executive, and combines attack with sustained self-defence against claims made in the opponent's preceding releases, an expansion of the rivalry field. "Not Like Us" concentrates its critical address on a single primary target and holds that concentration throughout, a narrowing of the field.

Narrative structure compares formal organisation. "Family Matters" is a long multi-part composition with documented beat switches, sequential argument, escalation across parts, and counter-narrative defence. "Not Like Us" is a compact linear attack built on a repeated chorus, slogan formation, and a claimed closure of the exchange.

Identity and authenticity framing compares the claims advanced in the texts. The narrator of "Family Matters" advances individual identity framing: claims of personal standing, commercial position, and resilience, with the opponent constructed as a failed accuser. "Not Like Us" advances collective identity framing: an us-and-them boundary from the title onward, regional-belonging and cultural-membership claims, and an outsider construction of the target as extracting value from scenes to which he does not belong. As subordinate reputational framing, the artifacts direct allegation categories at each other: credibility, family, relationship, and conduct allegations toward Lamar in "Family Matters," and sexual-misconduct and cultural-appropriation allegations toward Drake in "Not Like Us." All are authenticity, membership, or delegitimation claims within the artifacts, and authenticity is analysed as a claim advanced within the artifacts rather than an established personal quality.

Participatory design features are properties of the artifacts, not observed audience behaviour. "Not Like Us" contains repeated phrases, chant-like structure, dance cues, and slogan-ready wording. "Family Matters" contains argument density and textual material inviting scrutiny across its parts. The dataset captures artifact design and public counters rather than audience imitation, sharing, debate, or identification.

Documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism is reported only from directly captured or independently documented materials, because the available visual evidence comprises captured and independently documented materials rather than a completed time-coded log of the full videos, and timestamps were not recorded. Documented production records establish that the "Family Matters" video incorporates the on-camera destruction of a van associated with the artwork of the opponent's earlier album, an image that also supplies the captured thumbnail, and a scene at a Toronto restaurant referenced in the opponent's own diss. [35] Documented records establish that the "Not Like Us" video was shot in Compton with community and regional imagery [39], and that its single cover artwork presents an aerial residence image overlaid with registry-style markers, a visual that extends the track's central allegation and later featured in litigation concerning the artwork. [40]

Table 4: Comparative Competitive-Signalling Configurations

Coding dimension	“Family Matters”	“Not Like Us”	Evidence source	Evidentiary limitation
Attack concentration	Multiple targets; attack combined with self-defence; rivalry field expanded.	Single primary target, sustained; field narrowed	Lyrics as documented	Single-coder reading
Narrative structure	Long multi-part composition; beat switches; escalation; counter-narrative defence	Compact linear attack; repeated chorus; slogan formation; closure claim	Lyrics and credits as documented	Single-coder reading
Identity and authenticity framing	Individual standing and resilience claims; opponent as failed accuser	Collective us identity; regional-membership claims; opponent as outsider	Lyrics as documented	Claims only; single-coder reading
Reputational framing (subordinate; artistic allegations)	Credibility, family, relationship, and conduct allegations toward Lamar	Sexual-misconduct and cultural-appropriation allegations toward Drake	Lyrics as documented	Allegations only; truth not evaluated
Participatory design features	Argument density; textual material inviting scrutiny	Repeated phrases; chant structure; dance cues; slogan-ready wording	Lyrics as documented; documented performance history	Design properties, not audience behaviour
Documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism	Opponent-associated van purchased and destroyed on camera; Toronto restaurant scene; destruction imagery in thumbnail.	Compton community imagery; artwork with registry-style markers extending the central allegation	Captured thumbnail; documented artwork; documentary production records; court records	Documentary scope; evidence set excludes a time-coded log.

5.4. Joint Descriptive Comparison

At the verified capture date, the concentrated and repeatable configuration of “Not Like Us” was observed alongside the larger cumulative view total, whereas the longer multi-target counter-narrative of “Family Matters” was observed alongside higher visible like and comment rates per 1,000 recorded views. This juxtaposition is descriptive and cannot distinguish content characteristics from release timing, prior circulation, external amplification, video age, or audience-community differences. Each artifact therefore displayed an internally coherent signalling configuration alongside a distinct counter profile, and the pairing is reported as an observation, not as a tested relationship.

5.5. Boundary Conditions and Rival Explanations

Five groups of unmodelled contextual factors bound the comparison, and each supplies rival explanations for the indicator differences. Release-history conditions comprise track and video timing, the two months of prior audio circulation before the “Not Like Us” premiere, and the 62-day (approximately two-month) difference in video age at capture. Artifact-format conditions comprise the duration difference, the multi-part against compact structure, and the artifacts’ unequal replay potential. External-amplification conditions comprise live performance, news exposure,

awards-related visibility, and cross-platform promotion; the documentary record shows that both tracks entered national charts immediately [41] and that “Not Like Us” attracted a documented mass live premiere [39], major awards [42], and a nationally televised performance [43] during the interval covered by the frozen counters, records used here solely as context. Audience and artist conditions comprise pre-existing audience communities, artist prominence, and audience-composition differences. Platform conditions comprise recommendation-system exposure, repeat viewing, possible unobserved paid promotion, and the mutability of platform displays. None was modelled or controlled; all are carried into the Discussion as rival explanations.

5.6. Answers to the Research Questions

On RQ1, the artifacts embody contrasting configurations: single-target, compact, repeatable, and collectively framed in “Not Like Us”; multi-target, extended, argumentative, and individually framed in “Family Matters.” On RQ2, “Not Like Us” recorded the larger cumulative circulation and “Family Matters” the higher approximate interaction densities, as reported in Table 2. RQ3 is answered in the Discussion.

6. Discussion

6.1. Cumulative Circulation and Visible Interaction Density

The central quantitative result is configurational: the artifact with approximately 9.6 times the cumulative recorded views shows the lower approximate like and comment rates per 1,000 views, so circulation breadth and visible interaction density order the same two artifacts in opposite directions. Interpreted through the platformed-attention pillar, this is what counters as distinct platform constructions would permit: views record circulation events, like rates record the density of one visible action, and comment rates record the density of another, and none is interchangeable with the others. [1,8] High cumulative circulation did not entail the highest normalised visible interaction here, and a high comment density is not evidence of positive sentiment. The comparison illustrates why public platform performance should be disaggregated into circulation breadth and distinct forms of visible interaction rather than collapsed into a single success indicator; from two cases, this is an illustration and a caution against single-number readings, not a universal law.

6.2. Contrasting Competitive-Signalling Configurations

Read through competitive dynamics, the two artifacts are different move types executed within one rivalry sequence: a concentrated single-target attack with a claimed closure, and an extended multi-target counter-narrative combining attack with defence [2], in a personalised exchange whose escalating, audience-facing character is what rivalry research would expect between familiar, repeatedly matched opponents. [13] Read through signalling theory, the configurations transmit different claimed qualities through different devices: collective membership, regional belonging, and delegitimation of the opponent as an outsider in one case; individual standing, resilience, and delegitimation of the opponent as a failed accuser in the other. [6] Read through authenticity scholarship, the insider and outsider boundary-work and the cultural-authority claims follow the genre’s established contest form, in which authenticity discourse supplies both ammunition and evaluative criteria [7], a contest whose public reception standards were themselves in flux in this episode. [11] Neither configuration is stated to be more credible, authentic, or effective, because public counters do not reveal signal acceptance.

6.3. Theoretical Integration

The three pillars perform complementary work on the same object. Competitive dynamics explains the rivalry sequence and the structure of the moves; signalling and authenticity explain the symbolic and reputational content the moves carry; and platformed attention explains the visibility environment and the meaning and limits of the public counters attached to each move. The study shows how a rivalry move may be examined simultaneously as a strategic action, a bundle of identity and credibility signals, and a platform-distributed artifact whose visible indicators remain partial and infrastructurally produced. This integration illustrates and extends the application of the three literatures to a setting they rarely address together and provides an analytically bounded example with sensitising propositions; it integrates established perspectives rather than developing new general theory, and it treats nothing in the two cases as validating or confirming any theory.

6.4. *Rival Explanations and Interpretive Boundaries*

The rival explanations identified in the Results carry substantive interpretive weight. The larger cumulative total of “Not Like Us” cannot be attributed to its content configuration, because prior audio demand accumulated over two months before the video premiered, the delayed official-video release means its counters aggregate demand partly formed elsewhere, and release timing, video age, documented performance history, media amplification, unobservable recommendation exposure, audience-community differences, and repeat viewing all move in directions that could produce the observed contrast without any contribution from content design. That restraint is consistent with experimental evidence that cultural-market outcomes are path-dependent and socially amplified rather than reliably attributable to content characteristics. [25] Symmetrically, the higher comment rate of “Family Matters” cannot be interpreted as approval: a comment records composed text of unobserved valence, and the density difference may reflect debate, disagreement, scrutiny, controversy, fan mobilisation, criticism, or repeated participation by the same accounts. The design cannot adjudicate among these explanations, and none is selected; the configurations are interpreted through theory while their production remains unexplained.

6.5. *Propositions for Future Testing*

The three post-analysis sensitising propositions for future multi-case testing, none preregistered and each generated after the descriptive comparison, are restated for designs with multiple rivalry episodes, longitudinal captures, and controls for release timing, prior circulation, and artist- and platform-level context. P1: across a larger set of music-rivalry episodes, concentrated and repeatable competitive-signalling configurations may be associated with wider cumulative platform circulation, subject to prior circulation, release timing, and external amplification. P2: across a larger set of music-rivalry episodes, argument-dense and allegation-dense artifacts may be associated with higher visible comment density, although comment sentiment may vary. P3: prior audio circulation, live performance, media exposure, and recommendation-system visibility may condition the association between competitive-signalling configuration and cumulative platform indicators.

7. Managerial, Legal-Risk and Platform-Governance Implications

7.1. *Artists and Artist Managers*

The findings suggest that managers should diagnose circulation and visible interaction separately rather than reduce both to a single performance verdict. Concretely, dashboards and post-release reviews should treat cumulative circulation, like density, and comment density as separate indicators; release context should be documented before rival artifacts are compared, since counters aggregate different exposure histories; high comment volume should not be read automatically as approval; and internal reporting should preserve the platform’s display precision rather than manufacture exactness from abbreviated counters. The two configurations documented here show that compact repeatable communication and extended argumentative communication are different strategic forms, and the diagnostic use of that observation is to evaluate an artifact’s counters against its own design and history rather than against a differently designed rival, and the study prescribes neither content form as a route to views or comments. Managers should also preserve dated platform captures when evaluating rivalry or campaign records, and should weigh content-form decisions against artist identity, legal exposure, platform rules, and audience context.

7.2. *Record Labels and Rights Organisations*

For labels and rights organisations, the implication is organisational governance of allegation-dense competitive content: pre-release review of lyrics, visuals, thumbnails, artwork, titles, and promotional copy; documented clearance decisions; escalation procedures for allegation-dense material; legal review that distinguishes artistic expression, reputational allegation, factual assertion, promotional amplification, platform monetisation, and organisational involvement; preservation of evidence and release records; and coordination among artist management, counsel, communications, and platform-policy specialists.

The documented federal proceedings arising from the rivalry provide a concrete organisational-risk context. In *Graham v. UMG Recordings, Inc.*, No. 25-CV-0399 (JAV), ECF No. 96 (S.D.N.Y. Oct. 9, 2025) [40], the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York granted UMG Recordings, Inc.’s motion to dismiss. Considering

“Not Like Us” within the broader context of a heated rap battle, the court held that the challenged statements constituted nonactionable opinion rather than objective factual assertions, and it dismissed the civil harassment and New York General Business Law §349 claims on separate legal grounds. The ruling did not adjudicate the underlying truth or falsity of the artists’ lyrical allegations. Graham appealed the district-court decision to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, where the matter was docketed as Case No. 25-2758 and remained pending at the verification date of 21 July 2026. [44] This article relies on the district-court Opinion and Order as its primary legal source, does not analyse the appellate briefing, and does not predict the appellate outcome. From a management perspective, the proceedings illustrate that allegation-dense artistic competition may create legal, reputational, and administrative costs for labels and rights organisations irrespective of the eventual merits of the claims; artwork can carry risk alongside lyrics, and exposure depends on jurisdiction, context, wording, presentation, and promotion. Nothing in this analysis constitutes legal advice, and artistic rivalry is not implied to be unlawful.

7.3. Platform-Governance Actors

The study’s data limitations raise governance issues while leaving any platform-level explanation unestablished. The abbreviation of like and comment counters constrained every rate reported here, which suggests a need for clearer disclosure of when and how counters are abbreviated; the mutability of public displays made frozen capture necessary, which raises the issue of date-specific record preservation for research reproducibility; policies governing the moderation and monetisation of allegation-dense artistic conflict merit consistent statement, since such content is simultaneously commercially valuable and reputationally hazardous, with the hazard distributed by tiered and unevenly transparent rules [19,24]; and the role of recommendation exposure in distributing rival artifacts cannot be observed from public counters at all, which illustrates the difficulty facing researchers and highlights a transparency limitation. The indicator differences reported in this study were partly shaped by platform distribution conditions that remain unobservable in the public dataset; the study claims neither platform favouritism toward either artifact nor any algorithmic influence.

7.4. Researchers and Professional Educators

For researchers and educators, the study’s procedures translate into teachable practice: frozen dated captures with documented provenance; exact formulas with precision carried from display to derived rate; explicit separation of measured, coded, contextual, interpretive, and proposed claims; disclosure of counter precision in every table; and an explicit rival-explanations register maintained beside the findings. Future work should add time-series captures before and after release events, sentiment analysis only with suitable ethical and methodological safeguards, and multi-episode designs before any causal modelling is attempted. The two-case procedure is offered as a transferable discipline for evidence handling, not as a validated universal template.

8. Limitations

8.1. Case Scope and Generalisation

The study contains two purposively and theoretically selected artifacts from one rivalry episode on one platform, and the cases do not constitute a probabilistic sample. The bounded design supports analytical comparison of two contrasting artifacts within one rivalry episode, but it does not estimate population-level relationships or establish patterns applicable to music rivalries generally, and the findings should not be generalised automatically to other artists, genres, platforms, episodes, or cultural settings. The narrow scope is also the design’s strength: it permits close, fully documented comparative examination, and what it restricts is empirical breadth and statistical generalisability, not the internal traceability of the reported comparison.

8.2. Temporal and Platform-Measurement Boundaries

The quantitative evidence represents one frozen capture date, and public counters remain mutable after capture, so viewing trajectories before and after 19 July 2026 are unobserved, and periods of growth, decline, revival, or event-linked change cannot be identified. Cumulative recorded views are exact as displayed but may include repeat viewing and do not identify unique viewers; the like and comment counters were abbreviated displays, so the derived rates are approximate and inherit the precision limitations of their numerators. The platform’s public interface leaves

recommendation exposure, private analytics, traffic sources, watch time, retention, and monetisation unobservable. These boundaries restrict the findings to a dated, display-based description of two counters' states; within that restriction, every reported figure is reproducible from the frozen record.

8.3. Case Comparability and Unmodelled Context

The artifacts are theoretically contrasting rather than matched. They differ in prior audio circulation, track and video release timing, video age at capture, duration, narrative form, existing artist audiences, live-performance exposure, news and awards-related amplification, cross-platform promotion, recommendation-system exposure, possible paid promotion, and repeat-viewing patterns. These documentary boundary conditions may plausibly contribute to the observed platform profiles, but none was modelled or controlled, so the study cannot attribute any metric difference to content configuration. What survives this restriction is the configurational finding itself: the descriptions of each artifact and of its counter profile hold regardless of which rival explanation produced the differences.

8.4. Qualitative Interpretation and Reliability

The qualitative analysis was conducted by a single coder, and the coded readings may reflect the coder's theoretical judgement. The safeguards used were predefined theory-derived categories with inclusion and exclusion rules stated in the Methods, a structured rival-explanation review, and evidence-level classification of every claim; the author worked as the sole coder without delayed recoding, so a stability or reliability coefficient does not exist, and predefined categories do not remove interpretive subjectivity. Categories such as authenticity framing, identity construction, participatory potential, and documented platform, thumbnail and artwork symbolism require interpretation by design, and the visual-element coding was confined to directly captured and independently documented visual materials, so the visual findings hold at documentary scope. The coded results are accordingly offered as transparent, traceable readings rather than verified frequencies.

8.5. Construct and Inferential Boundaries

The study measures cumulative recorded views, visible likes, visible comments, and their normalised rates, and nothing else. It does not measure viewer motivation, sentiment, approval, emotional response, audience identification, authenticity perception, loyalty, human-brand attachment, brand equity, revenue, legal liability, or overall competitive standing. A comment may be supportive, critical, hostile, corrective, or unrelated; a like does not reveal the reason for the action; a view establishes neither attention quality nor message acceptance; coded signal content does not establish signal credibility or reception; and observed co-occurrence cannot establish a causal mechanism. Conclusions in this study depend on none of the unmeasured constructs.

8.6. Platform and Documentary Mutability

Platform interfaces and display conventions may change, counters can be updated or removed, and videos and metadata may be altered, so the frozen dataset preserves the state used for analysis without guaranteeing that later viewers will observe the same public interface. The cited legal proceedings may continue beyond the district-court ruling relied on here, and the documentary context reported is current only to its stated dates. These mutabilities bound the durability of the descriptions, not their accuracy at capture.

9. Future Research

9.1. Multi-Episode Comparative Testing

The bounded two-case scope points directly to a larger comparative design covering multiple rivalry episodes, multiple artists, different genres, different levels of artist prominence, different platform environments, and comparable release windows. Such a corpus could test the sensitising propositions stated in Section 6.5 as preliminary expectations rather than established relationships: whether concentrated and repeatable signalling configurations are associated with cumulative circulation, whether argument-dense artifacts are associated with comment density, and whether collective and individual identity framing correspond to different platform profiles. Credible testing requires controls or modelled contextual variables for release timing, prior audio circulation, video age, artist-level audience scale, live performance, media coverage, cross-platform promotion, and recommendation exposure where accessible.

9.2. Longitudinal Platform Measurement

The single frozen capture points to repeated measurement beginning at or near release: hourly or daily captures during the initial release period, weekly captures thereafter, and event-linked captures following performances, awards, legal developments, or promotional activity. Longitudinal data of this form could describe growth trajectories, decay, revival, event-linked changes, like and comment accumulation, differences between track release and video release, and changing interaction density over an artifact's life. Repeated public captures would not by themselves provide causal identification, and any such programme should use platform-approved or otherwise ethically compliant collection rather than methods that breach terms of service or scraping restrictions.

9.3. Audience Reception and Comment Analysis

Because motivation and sentiment remain undetermined by public counters, audience-side research conducted with appropriate safeguards is indicated: surveys, controlled exposure experiments, interviews, focus groups, ethically reviewed comment analysis, and computational sentiment or discourse analysis. These methods could examine what public counters cannot: signal credibility, perceived authenticity, cultural membership, viewer motivation, approval and criticism, emotional response, and audience identification. Comment-based designs carry their own requirements: ethical review where applicable, minimal user identification, restraint in quoting ordinary users, explicit handling of sarcasm, irony, bots, spam, and coordinated behaviour, and a strict distinction between comment volume and comment sentiment.

9.4. Cross-Platform, Cultural and Governance Extensions

The single-platform scope points to comparison across YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, streaming services, and other official artist channels, whose architectures differ in recommendation systems, public metrics, content formats, monetisation, moderation, audience behaviour, and visibility duration. Cross-cultural and genre-sensitive extensions could examine hip-hop rivalry alongside regional music industries and emerging platform markets, where authenticity conventions and legal and governance environments differ. Platform-governance research could proceed through policy analysis, transparency reports, interviews with managers and platform-policy actors, content-moderation case comparison, and monetisation and recommendation documentation where available; such questions require these different designs.

10. Conclusion

This study compared the competitive-signalling configurations and publicly visible platform indicators of the two selected official YouTube videos of the 2024 Drake and Kendrick Lamar confrontation. On RQ1, the artifacts embody contrasting configurations. "Family Matters" displayed a longer, multi-part and multi-target counter-narrative emphasising individual competitive positioning, counter-defence, and argument density. "Not Like Us" displayed a more concentrated, repeatable, and collectively framed configuration emphasising regional and cultural-membership claims, insider and outsider boundaries, and performance-oriented repetition. All reputational content in both artifacts remains textual and artistic claims whose truth this study does not evaluate, and neither artist is concluded to be more authentic, credible, strategic, or effective.

On RQ2, at the verified capture date of 19 July 2026, "Not Like Us" displayed the larger cumulative recorded view total, 486,718,000, against 50,892,588, while "Family Matters" displayed the higher visible interaction densities, approximately 19.6 against 15.6 likes and approximately 3.6 against 0.8 comments per 1,000 recorded views. The normalised values are approximate because the like and comment counters were abbreviated displays, and none of these figures is a measure of competitive victory.

On RQ3, competitive dynamics interprets the artifacts as contrasting moves within one rivalry; signalling and authenticity perspectives interpret their identity, credibility, belonging, and delegitimation claims; and platformed-attention scholarship explains why cumulative circulation and visible action density must be analytically separated. The comparison shows that cumulative circulation and normalised visible interaction are distinct descriptive dimensions and that competitive-signalling configurations can be interpreted alongside, but not as demonstrated causes of, platform-

counter differences. The study contributes an integrated theoretical interpretation of platform-mediated music rivalry, a clear separation of circulation breadth from visible interaction density, and a transferable, provenance-sensitive evidence discipline; theory testing is reserved for future multi-case designs.

The comparison rests on two cases and one frozen capture, cannot determine audience sentiment or causal mechanisms, and depends throughout on the separation of measured, coded, contextual, and proposed claims; larger longitudinal and multi-case designs are needed to test what it proposes. The study's contribution therefore lies not in declaring a rivalry winner or identifying a universal content formula, but in demonstrating how competitive cultural artifacts and public platform indicators can be compared without exceeding the evidentiary limits of the available digital traces.

Data Availability

The frozen screenshot captures, derived platform counters and capture metadata supporting the reported analysis are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request; the coding-category definitions and calculation formulas are stated in full within the manuscript. The original audiovisual recordings, complete lyrics, artwork and platform-interface materials are third-party copyrighted materials and are not redistributed.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares the absence of any conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Authors' Contributions

Maximilian Mfaume: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review and Editing, and Project Administration.

Ethics Statement

The study analysed publicly accessible content from official artist-controlled YouTube pages, publicly displayed platform counters, published audiovisual artifacts and public documentary records. It did not involve participant recruitment, intervention, private communication, private analytics or collection of identifiable user-level data. Formal institutional ethics review was not sought for this research based on public digital materials. The author remains responsible for compliance with applicable institutional and journal requirements.

Consent Statements

Consent to participate: not applicable, because the study did not recruit or interact with human participants. Consent for publication: not applicable to participant data, and the manuscript is free of private participant information.

Copyright and Third-Party Material Statement

Song lyrics are absent from the manuscript and are never reproduced verbatim. Lyrical content is paraphrased solely for scholarly analysis. The underlying audiovisual recordings, artwork, platform interfaces and other copyrighted materials remain the property of their respective rights holders. Third-party screenshots, artwork and platform-interface images are likewise absent from the manuscript.

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