



Content Creation in Transition: Analyzing YouTube, YouTube Shorts, and Facebook's Influence on Content Creators Amidst and Beyond COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Despite the proliferation of YouTube channels and Facebook pages, literature examining their contribution and growth remains sparse. This study investigates the rise of content creators and the expansion of YouTube and Facebook during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In today's digital age, consumers often rely on online reviews before making purchasing decisions. The widespread availability of affordable internet has facilitated access to a vast array of online content. Consumers routinely consult YouTube for reviews on various products and services, from electronics to educational institutions. Using an explanatory research method, this study explores the significant growth of content creators and social platforms. The findings reveal an exponential increase in both social media usage and content creation. For instance, following India's lockdown announcement, YouTube experienced a 20.5% surge in subscribers, amassing 300 billion views in Q1 2021 (Agencies, 2020). Additionally, YouTube has paid over \$30 billion to creators, artists, and media organizations over the past three years (Alexander, 2021), contributing approximately \$16 billion to the US GDP in 2019, equivalent to 345,000 full-time jobs. The study concludes that pursuing a career as a content creator in 2022 is a viable option for those passionate about content creation.

Keywords: Content Creators, YouTube, COVID-19, Digital Creators, Facebook, Instagram

I. INTRODUCTION

The field of Online Content Creators (OCCs) remains underexplored, with only a few studies addressing this growing phenomenon. Brake (2022) emphasized the need for further research and a robust conceptual framework to understand OCCs' practices and the characteristics that contribute to their effectiveness. Despite this gap, the rise of content creators is unmistakable, driven by several factors. For instance, before purchasing a camera, refrigerator, or television from Amazon or Walmart, consumers often turn to YouTube to evaluate the product's worth. This trend of seeking online reviews extends to various decision-making processes, facilitated by widespread internet access and affordable connectivity. YouTube has become an essential tool for consumers, providing a plethora of content that aids in making informed choices. This accessibility has fueled the proliferation of content creators who cater to this demand. As more individuals rely on online content for guidance, the number of content creators has surged. However, the relationship between content creators and the platforms they use remains a critical area of study. Yan et al. (2022) explored this dynamic, highlighting the dependency effects between digital media and its content creators. Similarly, Kopf (2020) examined the power dynamics involved in the monetization of content creation, underscoring the influence of social media corporations on creators. This study aims to build on these insights, examining the exponential growth of content creators and the platforms that support them, particularly YouTube and Facebook, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

As people sought the convenience of purchasing products from the comfort of their homes, the growth of e-commerce sites has surged dramatically. According to a study by Statista (2021), out of the 7.74 billion people globally, 2.14 billion made purchases online rather than visiting physical stores, opting for the convenience of home delivery. E-commerce platforms play a crucial role in boosting the number of digital buyers, with periodic sales attracting customers looking to save money or afford otherwise expensive products. Research by Salesforce revealed that 87% of customers researched products online before purchasing, underscoring a promising future for content creators (Alaimo, 2018). Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have further amplified the reach of content creators through short, engaging videos that advertise products. Rach (2021) investigated the behavioral impact of TikTok on content creators by conducting interviews, finding that economically motivated creators were particularly receptive to platform-induced behavioral changes. This illustrates the significant influence social media platforms exert on content creators' strategies and practices. Building on these insights, this study aims to delve deeper into the exponential growth of content creators and the platforms that support them, focusing on YouTube and Facebook, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. By examining the interplay between content creators and digital platforms, this research seeks to shed light on the evolving landscape of online content creation and its implications for future trends in digital media.

As internet access has become nearly ubiquitous, millennials and older generations alike are increasingly rejecting traditional newspapers and written materials in favor of video content. This shift is partly driven by the diverse educational backgrounds within large populations, making it challenging to reach and engage

people through text-based information. Consequently, the world is evolving its preferences in line with technological advancements. Historically, newspapers and journals were pivotal in disseminating information. Today, digital infographics and videos, which are more accessible and easier to comprehend, have taken their place. Sharing simple JPEG files or short videos among friends and relatives has become commonplace, highlighting the preference for visual content. In response to this shift, many news organizations have launched websites and applications that prioritize infographics and videos. Newspapers now employ video journalists to deliver live news on platforms like YouTube, demonstrating the pivotal role visual content plays in disseminating information and ideas. The popularity of YouTube and Facebook has soared alongside the rise of video content. Content creators strategically use different platforms based on the length and depth of their videos: YouTube for longer, more detailed content, and Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat for shorter, more engaging videos. To compete with these short-form platforms, YouTube introduced YouTube Shorts, offering creators and consumers a variety of options for content creation and consumption. The advantages of video content over written content are clear. Videos can captivate audiences with animations, music, sound effects, and other dynamic elements, whereas lengthy written content often fails to maintain readers' interest.

Given the threats posed by COVID-19, people were compelled to stay home, leading to a surge in the number of content creators. While some achieved success, many faced challenges and failed. Gompa et al. (2022) investigated the difficulties encountered by individuals attempting to create content on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Their study, conducted with a sample from a private university in Pune, revealed that a significant number of aspiring creators lacked technical knowledge. YouTube remains one of the most popular video-on-demand streaming platforms. Holmbom (2015) examined the behavior of early YouTube content creators, identifying the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a channel on the platform and the crucial factors for channel growth. Through interviews, Holmbom found that an established channel could provide endless opportunities. Focusing on YouTube, Buf and Stephanita (2020) explored user gratification and the reasons content creators chose this platform. They concluded that YouTube's broad reach and user engagement make it an attractive choice for content creators. This study aims to build on these insights, examining the rise of content creators during the COVID-19 pandemic and the factors contributing to their success or failure.

II. OBJECTIVE

To analyze the rise of content creators and the growth of social platforms—specifically YouTube, YouTube Shorts, and Facebook—during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and in its aftermath.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How far do the content creators contribute to the rise of YouTube and YouTube Shorts and themselves?

RQ2: How far do the content creators contribute to the rise of Facebook and themselves?

RQ3: Is there an opportunity for content creators to earn a living using social sites?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts an explanatory research design, which falls under the descriptive research method. Explanatory research seeks to understand how or why a phenomenon occurs and predicts future occurrences, especially when there is limited information available. It serves as an initial step in the research process, laying the groundwork for future investigations (George and Julia, 2021). To fulfill the objective and address the four research questions, the researcher gathered information from reputable technology websites and research papers. Due to the vast amount of information available online, the researcher deliberately selected the most recent articles with statistical data published before August 10, 2021, ensuring relevance and accuracy. The collected data is organized under three sub-headings: "YouTube and Content Creators," "Arrival of YouTube Shorts," and "Facebook," providing a structured analysis of the study's findings.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

YouTube and Content Creators

COVID-19 threw India into chaos, prompting every state to gear up for the battle against this deadly virus. In response to this health crisis, the Indian government enforced a nationwide lockdown, compelling people to remain indoors. During this period, home-bound individuals turned to YouTube for entertainment and various other needs, resulting in a notable 20.5 percent surge in the country's subscriber count (Agencies, 2020). This surge in subscribers translated into increased exposure to YouTube's AdSense programs, leading to more advertisements being shown. Consequently, this trend benefited content creators, companies advertising their products, and YouTube itself. The first quarter of 2020 alone witnessed a staggering 300 billion views (Creative Brands, 2020), fueling the growth of both content creators and the platform. This unexpected boon during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the resilience of content creators and suggested a sustained growth in the subscriber base. YouTube's monetization initiatives have been instrumental in empowering creators, with CEO Susan Wojcicki's letter revealing that the platform has disbursed over \$30 billion to creators, artists, and media organizations in the past three years (Alexander, 2021).

The economic impact of YouTube cannot be understated, with its contribution to the US GDP in 2019 amounting to approximately \$16 billion, equivalent to sustaining 345,000 full-time jobs (Wojcicki, 2021). Sundar Pichai also noted a significant milestone, with half a million channels live-streaming on YouTube in 2020, marking a historic achievement since the platform's inception (Telangana Today, 2021). As COVID-

19 continues to disrupt gatherings in various places, professionals from different fields have shifted to remote work, and for content creators, YouTube has become a key platform. Among these creators are gamers who frequently live stream their gameplay on YouTube, drawing in a large audience of interested viewers. While gamers derive pleasure from playing, they also attract sponsorships from companies looking to promote their mobile games, ergonomic chairs, computer accessories, and more due to the wide reach of these videos. This sponsorship often translates into lucrative compensation for the creators. YouTube's prominence cannot be overstated—it ranks as the second most visited website globally after Google.com and the second most used social media site after Facebook, boasting a staggering 2.3 billion regular users and capturing 79 percent of internet users worldwide (Mohsin, 2021). As creators venture into this space, they typically handle all aspects of content creation, including scripting, narration, filming, editing, and publishing. While demanding, many creators who are passionate about their craft persevere, leveraging technological advancements and internet capabilities to forge new careers and income streams.

The allure of professions like professional gaming, stock trading, and video creation has grown significantly, driven by evolving technology and the internet's vast potential for revenue generation. Although success on YouTube isn't guaranteed, creators who consistently upload quality content often find ways to monetize their channels, whether through paid partnerships, service promotions, or product endorsements. Brands are eager to collaborate with creators with substantial subscriber bases, offering substantial compensation based on a channel's popularity and viewer retention rates. Prior to major brands reaching out to content creators, and even afterward, many subscribers are willing to support creators financially to sustain their channels. Platforms like *Patreon* and the recently launched *Buy Me a Coffee* facilitate this direct connection, allowing subscribers to contribute financially to content creators. Simultaneously, brands pay content creators for showcasing their advertisements either before or during their videos on YouTube. YouTube typically retains 55% of the advertising fees, with the remaining portion going to the content creator responsible for the video (Bloomberg, 2022). The number of advertisements featured within a video depends on its duration, with longer videos typically hosting more ads. Given this sizable deduction by YouTube, content creators have sought ways to bypass this intermediary. Some creators have been directly contacted by companies to embed ads within their content, receiving payments directly from the company. While these payments may be less than what the company would have paid YouTube, they often exceed what the creator would have received from YouTube, resulting in higher earnings for creators. Before the rise of platforms like YouTube, individuals seeking to express themselves online would often start a blog or contribute articles to newspapers in the form of editorials. YouTube's early days were characterized by a lack of sophistication, and the avenue for ordinary people to broadcast themselves was limited to traditional media outlets like TV channels.

With the advent of YouTube, the landscape of content creation underwent a dramatic transformation, allowing anyone with a smartphone and internet connection to film and broadcast themselves. The platform's viral potential shattered traditional barriers, reaching diverse audiences across the globe. Initially launched on December 15, 2005, YouTube's true capabilities were not fully understood, and its potential remained largely

untapped. During its nascent stage, YouTube predominantly featured home videos as users filmed anything and everything around them, sharing their content on the platform. However, as its user base grew, so did awareness of its reach and capabilities. Videos spanning a multitude of topics—ranging from makeup tutorials and healthy food recipes to educational content—began to attract diverse audiences with varied interests and preferences. The emergence of creators from different parts of the world led to the development of distinct niches, catering to specific audiences with unique tastes and cultural backgrounds. As creators witnessed their subscriber counts grow, they found validation and encouragement, recognizing an audience eager to consume their content. This growth spurred the formation of communities united by common interests, languages, or cultural identities. Beyond entertainment, many content creators leveraged their platforms to share knowledge, skills, and ideas, often engaging in charitable endeavors. Donations from subscribers were channeled into charitable causes, uplifting and empowering various communities around the world.

Content creators can earn varying amounts through video views, ad revenues, and sponsorships. Forbes reported that the highest-paid YouTuber in 2019-2020 was nine-year-old Ryan Kaji, who amassed an impressive \$29.5 million from 12.2 billion views and 41.7 million subscribers (BusinessToday.In, 2020). In today's content creation landscape, success hinges on strength and passion. Aspiring creators must believe in their content and approach YouTube as a serious job. If viewers resonate with their videos and see potential for growth, they can attract a substantial following. Building a loyal subscriber base is beneficial, but it also means navigating a competitive field if those subscribers are also content creators. Therefore, creators must possess excellent storytelling skills to captivate and retain their audience.

It's not always necessary for creators to have a clear plan from the start. Many successful creators began without a roadmap and still achieved significant success. As they delved into creating videos, they honed their skills—from scripting to filming to the final production stage when they hit the publish button. This journey of improvement not only refined their content but also endeared them to subscribers who appreciated witnessing the creator's growth and pursuit of their dreams. Today, with the widespread use of smartphones and increased social media engagement, accessing YouTube has become a part of daily life. People seamlessly integrate browsing YouTube into their morning and bedtime routines. Additionally, creators have tapped into the therapeutic power of sound, producing calming music that resonates with audiences, even aiding in relaxation and sleep. The key takeaway is that video content has become an integral part of people's reliance on internet-based entertainment and information.

The Arrival of YouTube Shorts

YouTube, known for its extensive library of long-form videos, stepped into the realm of short-form content with the launch of YouTube Shorts in September 2020 (Spangler, 2021). This move seemed to be a response to the rising popularity of TikTok, especially in light of TikTok's ban in India. Sundar Pichai, CEO of Alphabet and Google, highlighted the rapid adoption of this new format, with a staggering 3.5 billion daily

visitors recorded in February 2021 (Economics Times, 2021). The platform's beta version has since expanded to numerous other countries, experiencing remarkable growth as evidenced by a 131 percent increase in daily views from April to June, reaching a total of 15 billion views during that period (Mitter, 2021). YouTube Shorts has democratized content creation by empowering smartphone users to become creators without the need for expensive equipment like microphones, cameras, or editing software. Creators can now produce high-quality content solely using their smartphones, eliminating the necessity of investing in additional hardware or a computer for video creation.

YouTube Shorts provides creators with an array of editing tools, enabling them to weave together multiple clips, integrate music from a vast library, and utilize features like speed controls, timers, and countdowns—all accessible directly from their smartphones. In a bid to support and incentivize creators on this platform, YouTube introduced a \$100 million reward program in May 2021 (Perez, 2021). This initiative aims to recognize top creators whose original Shorts content generates substantial monthly engagement. Expanding on this effort, YouTube unveiled the specifics of the Shorts Fund on August 3, 2021. Under this fund, creators have the opportunity to earn between \$100 and \$10,000 based on their video's viewership and adherence to platform guidelines (Perez, 2021). The Shorts Fund serves as a mechanism for monetizing short-form content, empowering creators and solidifying YouTube Shorts' position as a formidable contender in the short-video landscape. This fund is set to operate throughout 2021 and 2022 and has been rolled out in more than 100 countries, including key markets such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Brazil, India, and numerous others.



The Contents of Facebook

Facebook has seamlessly integrated itself into our daily routines, often becoming the go-to platform when people pick up their phones. Whether for entertainment, news, or political updates, Facebook has become a one-stop destination, leveraging its algorithm to curate and highlight relevant content. This convenience and versatility have endeared Facebook to users worldwide, leading to its immense popularity. Beyond personal use, Facebook has also become a hub for businesses, offering them the opportunity to set up virtual shops and reach a vast audience of potential customers. The growth trajectory of content creators on Facebook mirrors that of YouTube, with a staggering 2.8 billion monthly users and 1.84 billion daily users (Associated Press, 2013). This data underscores the bright future ahead for Facebook as a social media powerhouse. Since reaching its first billion monthly users milestone in October 2012—a figure that doubled within five years—Facebook's user base has continued to soar. By June 2017, the platform boasted a whopping 2 billion active users. With such extensive daily engagement—1.85 billion users on a daily basis—brands are naturally inclined to invest in advertising on Facebook to ensure their products or services reach a broad audience. Facebook's unmatched capability to connect people has made it the preferred social media platform for a significant portion of users, attracting a remarkable 59 percent of social media users (eMarketer, 2020).

Facebook distinguishes itself from YouTube through its emphasis on shareability and user interaction. The platform continually evolves its format and content based on user expectations and interaction trends, ensuring a dynamic and engaging experience. Similar to YouTube, Facebook and its creators earn revenue through advertisements, particularly since the introduction of in-stream ads in 2017. This move has enabled Facebook to pay content creators for both on-demand and live videos featuring embedded advertisements, contributing to the platform's substantial ad revenue of \$84.2 billion in 2020—an impressive 21 percent increase from the previous year (Mohsin, 2021). Businesses worldwide have capitalized on Facebook's expansive reach, either establishing their presence or utilizing it as a tool to connect with potential customers. Through Facebook pages, companies showcase their offerings, making it easier for users to discover and engage with their products or services. The platform's impact is evident, with over 200 million small businesses leveraging Facebook's tools to connect with their target audience (Mohsin, 2021).

Moreover, Facebook serves as a primary news source for many users, with news channels, newspapers, and web portals utilizing Facebook pages to share breaking news reports or live updates. This accessibility has transformed the news consumption experience, surpassing traditional TV viewership for many individuals. Facebook's demographic makeup, with 65 percent of users under 35, makes it an attractive platform for businesses looking to target specific age groups with their advertisements. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of Facebook users—98.3 percent—access the platform through mobile applications, necessitating a strategic focus on optimizing video and image content formats for mobile viewing. Users spend an average of 19.5 hours per month browsing Facebook's content, the highest among social media platforms. This engagement, coupled with Facebook's vast user base, makes it an ideal marketplace for businesses seeking to maximize their reach and sales potential. A study by Emarketer in 2018 revealed that 86 percent of marketers utilized Facebook as a primary platform for advertising their products, further underscoring its significance in the digital marketing landscape.

The support and promotion of content creators have been on the rise, propelled by the expansive reach of Facebook. In a significant move, Facebook Inc. has committed to investing \$1 billion into its Facebook and Instagram platforms by 2022, signaling a concerted effort to attract and reward content creators who consistently produce high-quality content (Bell, 2021). This investment comes amidst a period of robust growth for Facebook, with reported earnings of \$29 billion from April to June—an impressive 56 percent increase compared to the same period in 2020. This surge in revenue can be attributed to the widespread COVID-19 lockdowns and curfews that led to increased digital engagement across various regions worldwide. The emergence of content creators from diverse backgrounds, speaking different languages, has led to a global consumption of content, transcending language barriers through the use of subtitles or English as a lingua franca. However, the accessibility of this content is contingent upon internet availability in different regions. Instagram, a subsidiary of Facebook, entered the short-form video market with Instagram Reels, launched on August 5, 2020, as a response to the popular Chinese app TikTok. This feature allows creators to produce videos up to 15 seconds long, complete with recording, editing, and sharing capabilities alongside music and sound effects. Over time, Instagram expanded the duration to 30 seconds and further to 60 seconds on July

28, 2021. Speaking at Facebook's inaugural Creator Week in 2021, Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook and Instagram, emphasized the company's commitment to providing creators with a platform to thrive, stating, "Our goal is to be the best platform for creators like you to make a living." This dedication underscores Facebook's ongoing efforts to empower content creators and foster a vibrant creator community.

VI. CONCLUSION

Across various social media platforms, content creators assume roles such as influencers, affiliate marketers, entrepreneurs, or individuals monetizing their skills, ideas, humor, and other creative offerings. Content creation spans beyond video appearances, encompassing music compositions and textual narratives. Irrespective of the content type, there exists an audience appreciative of diverse content genres. Consequently, numerous content creators ascend to fame or attain financial rewards by publishing content aligned with their interests. For instance, prominent brands allocate substantial compensation to influencers for showcasing their products on platforms like Instagram. This symbiotic arrangement results in mutual benefits, with brands capitalizing on increased product visibility facilitated by the influencer's endorsement, while influencers receive remuneration as per their contractual agreements with brands. Similarly, content creators engaged in affiliate marketing receive a share of profits generated through product sales facilitated via their social media channels. Another avenue of revenue generation for content creators is through advertisements featured in their videos, supplemented by subscriptions and donations from supportive subscribers. Business owners leverage social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook to promote their products through video advertisements, tapping into the vast audience base these platforms offer. In the past, content creation necessitated expensive equipment such as cameras and computers for video recording and editing. However, the ubiquity of smartphones equipped with camera functionalities and editing applications has democratized content creation. Furthermore, the accessibility of internet connectivity via smartphones facilitates seamless content publishing across various platforms, eliminating the need for specialized equipment or technical expertise. Contemporary content creators benefit from a multitude of platform choices, allowing them to tailor their content dissemination strategy to diverse audiences and preferences. This democratization of content creation and distribution has ushered in a new era of opportunities for aspiring creators, encouraging them to leverage existing resources and commence their creative journeys. Research indicates that content creators can sustainably earn a livelihood, evident from the exponential growth and statistics observed in recent years. The collaborative efforts of content creators and social media platforms foster audience engagement and revenue generation, illustrating a mutually beneficial partnership driving the digital content ecosystem forward.

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