

The Rise Of Content Creators In The Face Of A Pandemic: The Case Of A Private University In Pune

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Abstract

The concept of content creators is not new especially when youtube became a platform where anyone could set up a channel and create videos. Prior to this most content creators were writing blogs on different platforms but youtube gave the liberty of videos which were more attractive and easy for people to view. Since the Pandemic created a Global Lockdown the rise of content creators grew by leaps and bounds. The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of content creators in the selected context that sprouted as a result. To achieve this purpose, interviews were conducted and the findings included the most popular content creation platforms to be Youtube, Facebook and Instagram. Interviewees were in the age group of 18 to 28 years and were motivated to get into content creation with the encouragement of family and friends and a sense of calling to create certain content. The challenges that most of them faced were lack of technical knowledge as well as discouragement when they saw lack of viewership and slow gain of subscribers.

Keywords: content creator, pandemic, education, online platform,

Introduction

In the year 2019 when the pandemic hit most places on the globe, this world came to a standstill a few months later in 2020. Businesses were closed, and academic institutions closed as did many other places. A lot of people lost jobs, some had to work from home. Students were now required to attend classes online in order to continue their studies. Office workers who had desk jobs were tied to their computers and had to work from home using these devices.

The concept of online education is not new, though different for the students who have been attending offline classes for years, online classes came with their challenges. Students now had access to a device that was required for classes and therefore became attached to these devices day in and day out.

Students began using these devices from morning to evening to accomplish many tasks ranging from attending classes, watching videos, typing notes or assignments, and attempting quizzes, among other things.

All of a sudden most of these students as well as work-from-home office workers had their world revolve around these smart devices. They also had ample time to sit around with no one to talk to or interact with in the physical world but could use all that time to interact with friends, co-workers, classmates, and relatives online. This gave them the confidence to use these smart devices and get comfortable in front of the cameras these devices had on them.

We can notice that a lot of people began going on social platforms and becoming content creators. Most of this content seemed to be duplicated but nevertheless, the same content with different faces. Terms such as 'content creators' and 'influences' picked up relevance. Online tutorials began on social media platforms such as youtube, Instagram, Facebook, and the likes. Suddenly everyone became a guru with some kind of 'Gyan' to share.

Literature Review

What motivates students to suddenly grow as content creators

When students had more time on hand than they used to as well as their hands-on technology metamorphosed into handy tools for ready-made meetings as well as the opportunity to be of help to others who needed help in creating meetings as well as attending meetings, a lot of these students grew conscious of the fact that they had the power to transform lives as well as be of help to others with this new skill that was needed by so many people.

Applications to create and edit videos were readily available on phones as well as desktop computers. The world was ready for the pandemic in terms of technology even though it was not ready in terms of Health care. With the use of these applications, everyone was ready to call themselves content creators.

Some were able to use photos and transform them into quotes that could be used to motivate others. Others were able to shoot videos and educate others on the knowledge they lacked. Topics varied from classroom lectures to health awareness tips to religious enlightenment and the list can go on and on and on.

According to Buf et al. (2020) content creators did not become content creators overnight. They began watching vloggers in their area of interest and later on wanted to create their own channel. The author further elaborated on this by stating that the desire to become a content creator was triggered by the success of the vloggers that they began watching. The author further elaborates on the fact that the biggest barrier that most content creators have is fear of how others would think of them. The other fears that the author discovered were that most content creators were afraid that they did not have the tools to create content.

Type / Nature of Content Creators

According to Peltola (2019) the people who go on to become social media influencers or content creators are 'regular people'. They are people who have a goal of influencing others and creating some kind of awareness around a product or service.

Nandagiri (2018) states that the users of social media are often exposed to trends and marketing that the social media influencer or content creator exposes them to. They also present in their findings that most people prefer content creators over advertisements that are made by the companies that create and sell the products.

Smith et al. (2018) look at content creators as brand ambassadors. These brand ambassadors were considered into a relationship with the company based on the compensation they received from the company. This compensation came in different forms. These could be either in free products or monetary benefits.

Broadcasting Practices

According to Hou (2019) most YouTubers own and run two or more channels. This leads to diversity. These content creators are in the business of showing their main content on one channel and keeping the other channel for a glimpse into their personal lives. Some of these content creators look at creating vlogs and giving these fancy names such as 'Vlogtober' where they combine the words vlog and October. Most of these creators look at seasons where their content would make a difference to others and in so doing they increase the frequency of their video uploads.

Lind (2018) talks about live streaming and gives an overview of the many platforms that exist today to give a decent exposure to content creators who want to promote their content on a live feed. The

author suggests that Youtube could be considered the most cost-effective platform, especially for beginners. Monetization is a word that caught my attention where content creators were allowed to earn money if they met a certain requirement and by doing so they could earn a steady revenue. Twitch.tv is another popular platform that allows gamers to go live and showcase their gaming content. This, in the recent past, has also allowed talk shows and other relevant content. There are also some platforms like Facebook and Twitter that do allow content creators to stream live content to their followers. There are other professional platforms that are a bit expensive and would require the content creators to subscribe to their services. These platforms include Ustream, Livestream, and DaCast. Between all of these platforms that do allow content creators the opportunity to live stream, the content creator is required to own or rent certain specialized hardware in order to go live for a certain event.

Educational content

De Veirman et al. (2019) gives insight into the influence of content creators on children as a lot of children watch content such as unboxing toys, or videos of their favorite vloggers who are playing games or reviewing toys telling stories and the likes. There are certain content creators who are as young as seven years old when they were able to gather a subscriber base of 19 million subscribers. Producers of products target such kinds of content creators due to the fact that they are able to reach out to many potential customers and therefore are willing to send their products to these content creators for free so that they can review their products.

According to Truman, J. (2019) tutors are being converted into content creators. This is only possible after the tutors go through training and support. There is an ecosystem built around the tutor where they are supported with peer review and formative feedback on best practices whereby the quality of their content could be improved and stand out.

Kassymbayeva et al. (2018) acknowledge that social media is not only used as a tool to communicate but also as a tool to share knowledge. They go on to tell that platforms such as Instagram focus on creating content. This content can be categorized as photographs, videos, blogging, or as simple as maintaining a social media account. The authors say that anyone who is contributing to the social media presence in the online world is part of content creation.

Ashman et al. (2018) call out the fact that in the modern world that we live in, almost everyone becomes a competitor on youtube as a content creator with the only requirement of having a google account and the sole resource of a smartphone with a decent camera on it. They go on to say that since there are no startup costs and since content creation on youtube is free, everyone becomes a content creator.

Privacy and Copyrights

Paskevicius (2021) states that due to copyright laws it becomes difficult for teachers to copy and share online resources on their own portal. This encourages the teachers to share or embed the original content on their portal which redirects the students to the original content but poses a few challenges one of which would be that the original content creator could remove the original content and this would lead to a dead link where the teacher who would want to use that content will not be able to do so any longer.

Hewage et al. (2022) goes on to state that more often than not content creators find themselves in a position where their opinions and expectations differ according to different websites and are sometimes confused about certain terminology. The term 'right to modify' is one term that is found more than what the content creator expects to be seen. The author goes on to say that the designers of these social media sites where content creators publish their work need to work on guidelines where the content creators are able to understand the copyright policies.

Fontes (2020) explains that if you have access to a file on a computer, that file can be stolen. Videos that are posted on online platforms are often stolen. He goes on to say that there are two forms of piracy - Unauthorized acquisition - where a customer is able to get hold of copyright material from unauthorized sites or storage devices, and - Unauthorized use - where the user tries to use content in an unauthorized way that he or she has obtained legitimately. The solutions that the author mentions are watermarks and fingerprint whereby even if the watermark is distorted, the original author can present the original content and prove ownership. Fingerprint on the other hand embeds information on the digital data and is more difficult to remove. Youtube is one such site where fingerprints are used to safeguard the work of content creators.

Most of the content creators that sprouted during the pandemic are very young and highly motivated. They see opportunities while most others find the pandemic as an extended holiday. They were able to work through motivating themselves even when faced with challenges that pulled their morale down. These are college students who found time to spend on a journey that was not part of their academics and were willing to take the time to be of use to motivate others around them. With this as the motivation for the study the following question was formulated to guide the study.

What is the nature of the social media influencers that sprouted during the pandemic?

Methodology

Taking into account the purpose, a qualitative approach was employed to conduct this study. Therefore, adhering to the methods, I interviewed 11 content creators from the selected institution who were willing to participate. These interviews were semi-structured and involved both male and female content creators. All of these interviews were conducted among content creators who began creating content during the pandemic. I was able to meet with all these content creators and interview them personally and so was able to ask them questions that were relevant to the semi-structured interview protocol. Where deemed necessary I asked follow-up questions to probe further. Most of the content creators were students, as such it was necessary to explain to them that their participation would have no bearing on their academic performance. Consequently, the objective of the study was explained to them and their voluntary participation was secured prior to conducting the interviews. I will not be divulging the personal information of these content creators but will be talking about the overall findings in the findings section.

I have looked at the platform these content creators use as well as what motivates them into taking on this journey. We talked about the importance of a thumbnail as well as what kind of software they used to create content. Finally we talked about the challenges as well as how they were able to overcome these challenges.

Findings and Discussion

The age group of the content creators that I was able to interview fall into the age group of between 18 and 28 years of age. These are students who began content creation while they were either in Highschool or when they joined college. Some of them are in the Post Graduate program too.

The nature of the content

The type of content that these content creators are involved in creating vary from stories based on good morals and spirituality to technology and even some create content on fiction and dance. Therefore there is a good span of content that they are involved in creating.

A few of the content creators found their motivation in friends and family, some found it in the videos they were watching and saw that there was something missing and wanted to fill that gap, others felt a

calling toward creating content spiritual content and seized the opportunity when the places of worship were closed they wanted to make sure that people stayed grounded and connected with God.

Choice of Social Media Platforms used

The platforms that were used also varied from whatsapp groups to facebook pages as well as youtube and instagram as a choice of social media platforms. With this in mind, we see that these content creators have a subscriber base beginning from 10 subscribers to 10,000 subscribers on youtube. One has created as many as 8 whatsapp groups to share content with members of these groups. Followers on Instagram vary from 80 followers to about 500 followers. This makes youtube the most active platform for these content creators.

The Journey

Some of the content creators began creating content right at the beginning of the lockdown while others began the journey much later as much as almost to the end of the lockdown period of the Pandemic. This shows that those who were highly motivated began earlier, but even though they began earlier they did not necessarily have more subscribers or followers. There was no relationship between the time duration of the content creators journey to the number of followers and subscribers.

Challenges

The challenges that most content creators face was the lack of motivation when they see that their content was not gaining recognition as very few people were watching, it took a long time to gain their first 1000 subscribers. Even if they were able to make it to the first 1000 subscribers, nothing was guaranteed to work with the number of views. This was heartbreaking for some of the content creators. Others had the challenge of trying to learn the software in order to create content. A couple had difficulties in getting access to good internet speeds in order to upload their content. Some faced criticism from friends and family while others faced abusive comments on their content. Some felt embarrassed because they associated success with the number of subscribers on their channel.

Coping

These content creators were brave and tried to find solutions to the challenges faced by trying to work harder than before, work on better quality content, taking time to plan. Reading and researching about the topic was another way to be able to overcome these challenges especially where it became difficult to explain certain topics. In order to overcome the challenge of posting content in a timely manner, planning and keeping content ready ahead of time worked for one of the content creators and therefore time management was very important. Some prayed hard before they began working on a content. Most of these content creators started focusing on the quality of content. There are a couple who are yet to overcome the challenges that they face.

Conclusions and Implications

According to the findings, content creators get discouraged with views and lack of subscribers, a suggested solution from the content creators interviewed, you could be consistent and prompt in keeping a stable flow of content. You could also stay away from getting discouraged by the hateful comments by trying to ignore them and staying focused on the goal of sharing your knowledge with the world. Quality of the content was highlighted by the content creators and thus this could be a major point of advice to stay in the game and enjoy the journey.

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