

## PHI334 : Content Creation and Ethics Oct 9

Today we are going to talk about a significant aspect of the online economy. Namely, content creation. I am not sure what the chunk of internet revenue comes from content and content creation, but I would say probably most of it. We watch youtube videos, listen to podcasts, sometimes read things online—this is all content, and so content creation is a huge driver of revenues online. Sometimes service rendering is rendering of content. Obviously e-commerce includes amazon and shipping chairs and physical goods. But again, I would say the internet economy is significantly reliant on content creation and consumption, so I think it is worth talking about. This is what we will do today—talk about facets of online content creation.

### 1. The Rise of Content Creation

Content creation refers to the production of material—whether written, filmed, recorded, or designed—that’s intended for an online audience. This could range from a journalist writing an article for an online publication, a YouTuber filming a tutorial, to an individual tweeting their thoughts on the latest political development, and even stupid little 30 second videos on tik tok. In this way if you have ever posted on the internet, you have contributed content. Usually we think of content creators being the big posters, and by and large yes, but this applies to you if say a reel goes viral or something. So all of us are content creators and also content consumers. Twitter or X nowadays lets people get paid if their tweets are popular. But again, I think that when we think of content creators we usually think of those who already are kind of big and have an audience.

I would say that content creation has really become big during the pandemic. Obviously people posted before, and all of this can be traced to early youtube, and monetization and all that. If you are old enough you will remember the initial youtube partner program, and how cool people thought it was to “be a partner” and how everyone wanted to be a you-tuber. I was one of those kids—I remember watching these channels take off, commentaries become popular, ray willian johnson was big. This was a thing, much like today I assume a lot of younger people want to be famous on tik tok.

But in fact it is in the last several years, five I would say, that this sort of modern content creation paradigm came to be. There are platforms, these platforms are the main distributors of content, there are content creators, if their content is popular or goes viral they are monetized. Sometimes the platform monetizes them, sometimes it is a sponsor, like in the videos you will often see them advertise ear buds or some other stupid stuff, and they basically get a paycheck for that. The basic model is this:

Creator : produces Content. Content : generates Engagement. Engagement : valuable to Brands. Brands : pay for inclusion in Content. Creator : paid for Content Consumer : sees Content + Brand Ads

So the contemporary paradigm is usually: (1) platform, (2) content creators on the platform, (3) creating content, (4) monetizing it either through: (a) the platform itself or (b) through non-platform sponsorship.

## 2. Platform Dependency and Its Implications

With this proliferation of content creators, there arose platforms offering spaces for these creators to share their work. This is youtube, tiktok, and so on. Patreon is different—there are no ads but it is a platform one explicitly pays for. But basically platforms are publicly available, anyone can post, and anyone can consume. This is different from private platforms like I said, such as patreon. I think there is a distinction worth talking about here between public and non public.

- **Algorithmic Control:** Platforms employ algorithms to determine which content is shown to whom and when. On the surface, these algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement, showing people the content they are most likely to enjoy. But under the hood, this often results in echo chambers, where users are repeatedly exposed to similar types of content, reinforcing existing beliefs and interests. This is bad if politics are involved.
- **Profit Sharing:** Many content platforms profit from advertisements. YouTube, for instance, places ads in videos, and both the platform and the video's creator earn from it. However, the revenue split is often skewed in favor of the platform. While exact percentages can vary, creators typically receive a fraction of the ad revenue generated by their content, leading to a power dynamic where creators can feel pressured to create content that the platform deems "advertiser-friendly." This or rely on sponsorship which also usually pays pennies.
- **Deplatforming:** Platforms reserve the right to remove creators or their content if they violate terms of service. Now, this is contentious. But the fact is this: corporations prefer very bland content to advertise for, so if you are a content creator that posts something that advertisers might not like, you will basically be excluded, and your revenue stream is now zero. This is why you see so often nowadays content creators particularly on youtube relying on private sponsorships with companies instead of running regular ads. There are benefits and downsides to this.
- **Advertiser Influence:** Since the primary revenue for many platforms and creators comes from advertising, advertisers wield significant power. This can shape the content that's produced, as creators may avoid topics or opinions they fear could lead to demonetization. But, more importantly, the content that is popular and gets most exposure is usually plain content that advertisers like. Youtube or tiktok might seem like a free market, right, if your content is good you will surely rise in ranking, but the truth is that the content that goes viral or is popular is usually content that advertisers like.

## 3. The Parasocial Phenomenon

Content creation, especially in video or streaming formats, fosters a unique dynamic between creators and their audiences, termed "parasocial interaction." Viewers often feel they have a personal relationship with the creator, even though the creator doesn't know them personally. This one-sided relationship can have emotional implications for viewers, leading them to form deep attach-

ments, defend creators vehemently, or even blur the lines between online content and real-world relationships.

This is a problem usually with young people who are naive and do not know any better. They are sometimes taken advantage of by the content creators or other nearby. The same phenomena is evident when people talk about celebrities as if they know them. Common in boy bands and stuff like that, also evident in the Stans, right, that comes from an Eminem song where there is an obsessive fan named Stan.

#### **4. The Influencer Paradigm**

We also now unfortunately have a class of people who are kind of parasites. They produced content that got them some following, and so now they “influence” opinions or whatever else, by being “influencers”. These parasites essentially get paid to heavily promote something, usually a sub par product or a kind of lifestyle that does not actually exist. It leads to this:

- **Monetization Over Authenticity:** With the potential for substantial earnings through brand partnerships and sponsorships, some influencers = prioritize monetary gain over authenticity. This raises concerns about the genuineness of their content and recommendations.
- **The Impact on Self-worth and Mental Health:** Influencer content often portrays an idealized version of reality—luxurious lifestyles, “perfect” bodies, and seemingly flawless lives. Such portrayals can adversely affect viewers’ self-esteem and mental health, as they measure their own lives against these unrealistic standards.
- **Ethical Responsibility:** With great influence comes great responsibility. Yet, not all influencers recognize or act upon this, sometimes promoting harmful products or behaviors.