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Monetisation and Meaning: Examining YouTube's Economic Model, Content Homogenisation and Online Celebrity Culture in Pakistan

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Abstract

YouTube has emerged as a transformative platform for income generation among young individuals in Pakistan, reshaping traditional economic pathways. However, its monetisation model influences the type of content produced, often incentivising sensationalism and trend-based formats over originality. This study explores the effects of YouTube's monetisation system on content homogenisation, the rise of online celebrity culture, and the spread of misinformation. Using a qualitative case study approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten YouTubers in Karachi. Thematic analysis revealed seven emergent themes, including economic pressures on creativity, algorithmic amplification of sensational content, and the establishment of social hierarchies among creators. Comparative insights from global studies highlight both similarities and regional nuances in creator behaviour. This study contributes to understanding how economic incentives shape content and credibility on digital platforms and offers implications for platform governance, creator education, and digital policy in emerging markets.

Keywords YouTube; Monetisation; Content homogenisation; Digital labour; Online celebrity culture; Misinformation; Pakistan.

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Introduction

YouTube has become an important platform for online earning for young individuals in Pakistan. Therefore, it is reshaping traditional methods of earning money (Shahzad & Fatima, 2023). However, the monetization model of YouTube can affect youtubers' content for monetary gains (Nasir et al., 2022). If the YouTube monetization model continues to influence content creation, and if ethical concerns arise from profit-driven-content, then it will have a long term impact on content quality, online celebrity culture, and sustainable economic opportunities for youth in Pakistan. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to highlight the impact of the YouTube monetization model on content and online celebrity culture. Nowadays, in this world, whoever has access to global media has awareness of sustainable development goals (Barr, 2022). Sustainable development goals focus on the planet, people, and profit creating business opportunities worth 12 trillion USD (Egbeh, 2018).

In this research, *content means online content creation, and defined as the monetized production of user-generated content, driven by the creator/influencer economy, which has grown significantly since Web 2.0* (Rieder et al., 2023). While *culture means online celebrity culture, and defined as the digital-age phenomenon where individual gains fame and commercial success through their internet presence, becoming influencer, and leveraging their online popularity for brand endorsement* (Brooks et al., 2021). YouTube is like a mixture of social media entertainment and television where people are building their career as youtuber (Cunningham et al., 2022). *A youtuber is defined as a freelancer, whose earning and image is decided by his popularity on YouTube, and this popularity is shown in the form of the quantity of subscribers they have* (Li et al., 2023).

Usually, a youtuber earns almost \$1.61 -\$29.3 per 1000 views. YouTube has almost 2.49 billion users. More than half users are aged between 18 and 34. Pakistan is ranked 7th in the list of top 10 countries with largest YouTube audience (Dean, 2024). YouTube is impacting the economic future of Pakistan. Numbers of views, engagement rates, quantity of subscribers, and video content type are the primary factors which influence earning (Han, 2020), and then successful youtubers can earn through advertisement deals, sponsorship offers, and product selling (Unger, 2018). In short, YouTube monetization model is a business model of YouTube which involves sharing advertisement revenue, and offering additional monetizing tools like Super-Chats through YouTube-Partner-Program (Hua et al., 2022).

Previous studies have focused on the economic dynamic of content creation on online platforms (Ren, 2024), and on quantitative relation between content sharing frequency and user engagement (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). Another study analysed the relationship between digitization and content homogenisation (Bourreau et al., 2021). However, a critical gap remains in highlighting the impact of

YouTube monetization on content creation. Furthermore, there is a need to understand the formation of online celebrity culture on YouTube. Additionally, it is necessary to study how the spread of misinformation and disinformation on YouTube occurs due to the monetization model.

While Necheushtai et al. (2023) identified homogenisation; still there is a lack of research into how homogenisation affects niche content. While Nasir et al. (2022) highlighted fraudulent content, it did not extensively explore how the “earn on YouTube” culture facilitates the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Brooks et al. (2021) studied “influencer celebrification”, however it did not examine the social hierarchies that emerge on YouTube based on earning potential and audience size. There is a lack of research into how the pursuit of income affects the interactions between creators.

There is a need to bridge these gaps by directly linking economic incentives to content production and promotion. There is a need to analyse the social hierarchies and power dynamics within the YouTube creator ecosystem. There is a need to investigate the impact of economic pressure on the spread of misinformation and the erosion of trust. This research can provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between YouTube economic model, content creation, and information sharing.

Objectives and Research Questions

Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Examine how YouTube’s monetisation model contributes to the homogenisation of content among creators;
2. Investigate the development of online celebrity culture and the emergence of social hierarchies within the platform;
3. Explore the extent to which monetisation pressures contribute to the spread of misinformation and erosion of trust in digital spaces.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways does the pressure to earn on YouTube influence the nature and diversity of content produced by creators?
2. How does YouTube’s monetisation structure contribute to the formation of social hierarchies and symbolic power among content creators?
3. To what extent does the pursuit of income on YouTube facilitate the creation or amplification of misinformation and disinformation?

Literature Review

Understanding the interplay between monetisation and content creation on YouTube requires an examination of several intersecting scholarly debates. These include the economic dynamics of digital platforms, the evolution of influencer labour, algorithmic governance, and the socio-cultural impact of content commodification. This section groups relevant studies thematically to frame the current research and identify critical gaps.

One major strand of research addresses algorithmic recommendation systems and their role in shaping content visibility. Nechushtai et al. (2023) conducted crowdsourced audits of algorithmic outputs across major platforms, including YouTube, and found a marked homogenisation of information exposure in top search results. While this study highlighted algorithmic bias and gatekeeping, it lacked focus on how such dynamics affect smaller, niche creators, particularly in non-Western contexts. Relatedly, Bishop (2020) explored the informal knowledge economy built around “*algorithmic expertise*,” showing how creators adapt to opaque algorithmic rules to remain visible.

Several studies examine economic pressures and monetisation strategies employed by creators. Rieder et al. (2023) conducted a large-scale analysis of linking practices across YouTube channels, revealing how elite creators rely on cross-platform monetisation to diversify income. Similarly, Hua et al. (2022) found that problematic or controversial channels are more likely to adopt alternative monetization strategies—such as merchandise sales or affiliate links, often bypassing platform regulation. These findings suggest that economic adaptation is not only common but may lead to platform circumvention. However, they stop short of examining the ethical and psychological impacts of such strategies on creators, particularly in developing media economies.

The economic realities of creators in developing nations have also gained attention. Mehta and Cunningham (2023) studied India’s digital audiovisual sector, noting how formal and informal economies converge in creator-led media ecosystems. Shahzad and Fatima (2023) extended this discussion to Pakistan, showing how youth engage with YouTube as a viable income source. Their findings indicate high trust in vloggers among users, particularly in the domain of product recommendations and how-to content. However, these studies focus more on economic outcomes than on how monetisation shapes content form and integrity.

A different research thread investigates the labour dimension of digital content creation. Paganini et al. (2021) used semi-structured interviews to analyse the self-taught, low-investment model of YouTubers’ work. Their findings illustrate a departure from traditional career paths and management norms, situating creators within the broader framework of digital labour and precarity. Ørmen and

Gregersen (2022) further contributed to this discussion by examining YouTube’s commodification of creative labour, audiences, and attention. They argue that creators become entangled in commercial logic that prioritises marketable output over authenticity, reinforcing platform-driven productivity.

From a technical perspective, Li et al. (2023) developed machine learning models to predict subscriber growth. Their platform “SmartYouTuber” demonstrates how data-driven tools can aid content strategy.

While technically robust, such work raises questions about the ethical implications of algorithmic content manipulation and its impact on diversity of thought, an issue central to this study.

In terms of misinformation and platform accountability, Nisar et al. (2022) analysed how creators promote fraudulent mobile apps for personal gain. Their study exposes how monetisation can inadvertently incentivise the spread of harmful or misleading content. While the platform’s responsibility is acknowledged, their work lacks insight into the personal rationale of creators engaging in such behaviour—something this study investigates qualitatively. Chu et al. (2022) added to this concern by examining exploitative monetisation practices and circumventive behaviours among creators, suggesting a link between monetisation design and harmful content proliferation.

Meanwhile, the formation of online celebrity culture has also been a subject of scholarly focus. Brooks et al. (2021) introduced the concept of “influencer celebrification,” describing how online creators accumulate celebrity capital through strategic engagement and self-promotion. Yet, they did not explore how these dynamics intersect with earning potential or create new social hierarchies. Sámelová (2020) extended this discourse by discussing how ordinary individuals adopt celebrity personas through digital platforms, offering insights into the symbolic structures of creator status.

Complementing this are discussions on cultural representation and information flow. Pietrobruno (2016) argued that YouTube reshapes cultural narratives by combining user agency with algorithmic logic. While optimistic about pluralism, her analysis predates the current economic and misinformation dynamics, making it less applicable to present-day monetised ecosystems.

Additional studies have focused on viewer engagement and economic outputs. Han (2020) found that views and comment rates are stronger predictors of revenue than subscriber count, and that channel age negatively correlates with earnings. His study offers useful metrics but lacks consideration of content ethics or creator wellbeing. Ren (2024) took a broader approach, analysing the dual role of content as both creative expression and a vehicle for advertising. While insightful, his work does not address the impact of these dynamics on creators operating outside Western economies.

Finally, recent comparative studies like Ayub and Ali (2023) examined microcelebrity practices among Pakistani YouTubers. Their work confirms the use of sensational tactics to attract attention, yet does not unpack the underlying economic or algorithmic motivations. This study builds on such work by directly linking financial incentive structures to creator behaviour and the integrity of digital content.

Taken together, these studies provide a strong foundation but reveal a consistent oversight: the nuanced relationship between monetisation, symbolic power, and content integrity in under-studied regions. By investigating creators in Karachi, this study contributes to filling that gap—highlighting how economic pressures and platform algorithms shape digital labour and public discourse.

Research Methodology

To construct the problem statement for this study, the researcher adopted the framework proposed by Jacobs (2013), which outlines four essential components: principle proposition, interactive proposition, speculative proposition, and explicative proposition. The methodological design was further guided by Saunders et al.’s (2016) *"research onion"* model, as illustrated in Figure 1. This model outlines six layers for designing social research: research philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, strategy, time horizons, and data collection and analysis techniques.

This study employed an interpretivist philosophy, suitable for exploring the subjective meanings and motivations behind YouTubers’ content strategies. An inductive approach was adopted, allowing patterns and insights to emerge from qualitative data. A case study methodology was selected to enable an in-depth understanding of a specific population, YouTube creators in Karachi. The research employed a mono-method strategy with a cross-sectional time horizon, capturing creators’ perspectives at a single point in time.

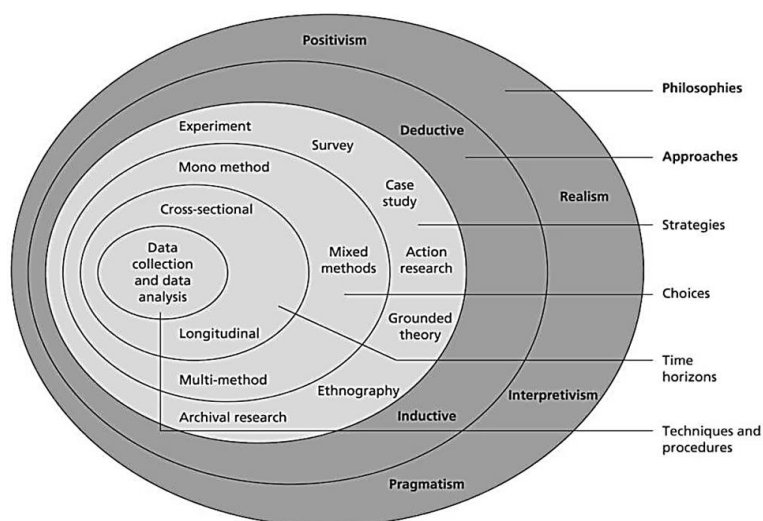


Figure 1. Research Onion Proposed by Saunders et al. (2016)

The target population comprised active YouTubers based in Karachi. Using purposive sampling, ten participants were selected to reflect a diversity of content types, audience sizes, and monetization statuses. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews guided by a flexible protocol, allowing for probing and thematic exploration. Interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analysed manually using Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis framework. Coding was iterative and inductive, and ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate how economic incentives embedded within YouTube’s monetisation system influence both the production and character of digital content. Participants reported that the potential for financial gain frequently shaped their creative decisions, often leading to a narrowing of content types that align with trending topics or advertiser-friendly formats. This pattern reflects a broader trend of content homogenisation, where diverse voices and niche perspectives may be sidelined in favour of maximising reach and revenue.

Moreover, the data suggest that YouTube’s economic architecture contributes to the formation of an emergent online celebrity culture, wherein creators derive symbolic and social capital from metrics such as subscriber count and audience engagement. As some creators ascend these metrics-driven hierarchies, a power imbalance develops within the creator ecosystem, structuring not just content visibility but also social dynamics, brand opportunities, and collaboration potential.

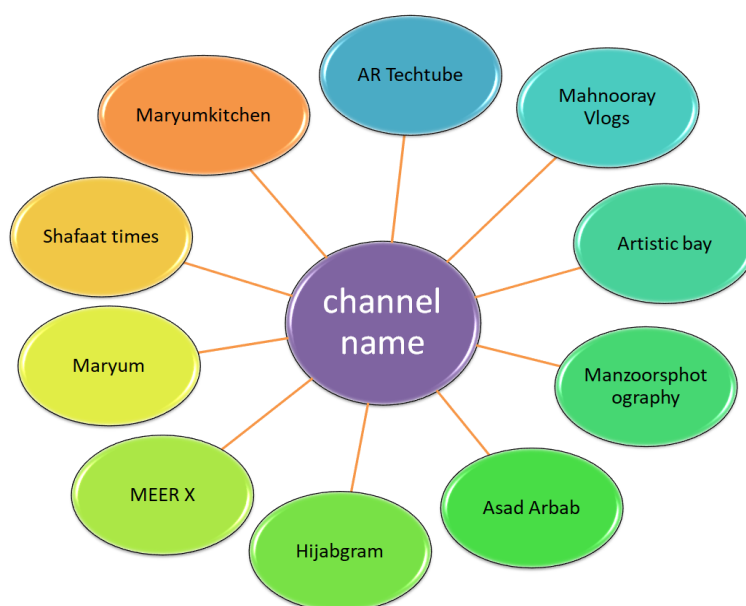


Figure 2. Channel Names of Respondents

Participants in this study represented a variety of YouTube channels based in Karachi, Pakistan. Channel names included AR Techtube, Mahnooray Vlogs, Artistic Bay, Manzoorphotography, Asad Arbab, Hijabgram, MEER X, Maryum, Shafaat Times, and MaryumKitchen (Figure 2).

These channels covered a wide range of content categories, including educational content, art, photography and videography, music, daily vlogs, and interview-based formats. A few themes appeared more than once; for example, two participants operated lifestyle channels, while another two focused on cooking-related content. These overlapping themes are noted in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Channel Themes of Respondents

The subscriber base for these channels varied significantly, ranging from as low as 570 subscribers to over 11,000. Some participants had monetised their channels while others had not yet reached that stage. As a result, monthly earnings among respondents ranged from USD0 to approximately USD50. Gender representation in the study was balanced, with five male and five female participants (Figure4).

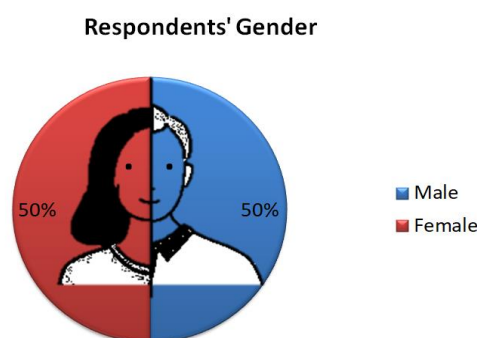


Figure 4. Gender of Respondents

In terms of socioeconomic status, all participants self-identified as middle class. Most respondents belonged to Generation Z, while a smaller group identified with Generation Y (Millennials) (Figure 5). These generational distinctions are relevant to the ways participants interpret digital success, personal branding, and the pursuit of YouTube careers.

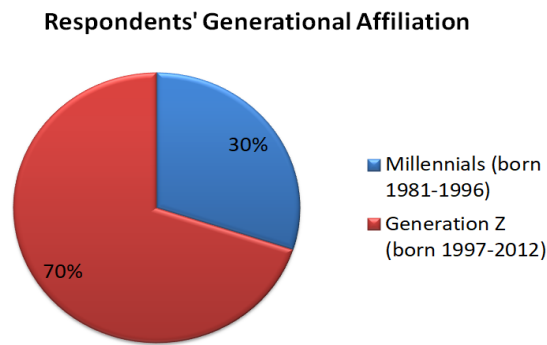


Figure 5. Generational Affiliation of Respondents

Regarding education level, the majority of participants held a Bachelor's degree. A smaller number had completed Master's degrees, and a few had attained education up to intermediate level (Figure 6). This educational background further contextualises the participants' entry into the creator economy, often without formal media training.

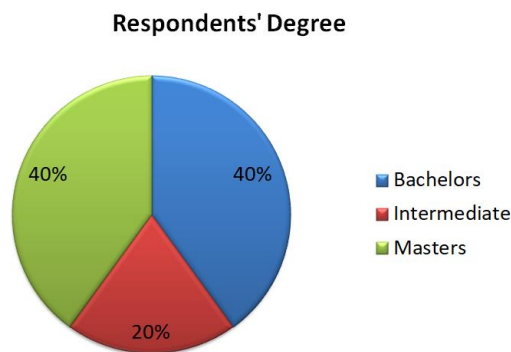


Figure 6. Degree of Respondents

Following data collection and analysis using Braun and Clarke's thematic framework, seven central themes were identified across participant responses. These themes reflect the nuanced experiences of creators navigating economic pressures, algorithmic dynamics, and audience expectations.

The seven emergent themes are:

- The Dominant Influence of Ad Revenue on Content Creation
- The Trade-Off between Revenue and Creative Freedom

- The Algorithm’s Role in Promoting Trending or Sensational Content
- The Hierarchical Structure of the Online Content Creator Community on YouTube
- The Impact of “Earn on YouTube” Culture on Creator Interactions
- The Prevalence of Sensational and Misleading Content
- Concerns about Misinformation and Disinformation

Thematic Analysis and Discussion

The following discusses the analysis and findings based on the emergent themes.

The Dominant Influence of Ad Revenue on Content Creation:

This theme highlights how the pursuit of advertising revenue can significantly shape content strategy among YouTube creators. Many participants reported that financial considerations directly influence the topics they choose to produce, often encouraging alignment with trending topics or audience-preferred formats in order to maximise views and income.

For instance, several respondents admitted to intentionally selecting popular topics to attract a broader audience. Respondent 3 noted, *“[The impact is] very much. I usually select that topic which is already highlighted on YouTube, maintaining consistency along with tone and style in my video.”* Similarly, respondent 6 acknowledged, *“Yeah, it does have an effect. I try not to post anything that gives less revenue.”* These responses reflect a content strategy heavily informed by revenue logic rather than creative independence.

Other respondents provided nuanced insights into the types of content that typically generate higher income. Respondent 1 pointed out that *“tech channels generate more ad revenue,”* suggesting that some content categories are inherently more lucrative. Respondent 4 added, *“I create podcasts, and my earnings are influenced by SEO and content categories. When people search for specific keywords and watch my videos or podcasts, the revenue can vary. However, based on my experience, CPM is generally low in Pakistan, and ad revenue largely depends on the content.”*

However, not all participants were driven by monetisation. Some expressed a preference for content rooted in passion, skill, or audience value. Respondent 10 observed, *“So far, nothing has changed. There are only talks about its influence... in my opinion, there is nothing like that.”* Similarly, respondent 7 stated, *“This is a great opportunity to showcase your talent. If you’re truly talented, people will come to you. Consistency is crucial.”* These contrasting viewpoints underscore the tension between artistic autonomy and financial pragmatism in content creation.

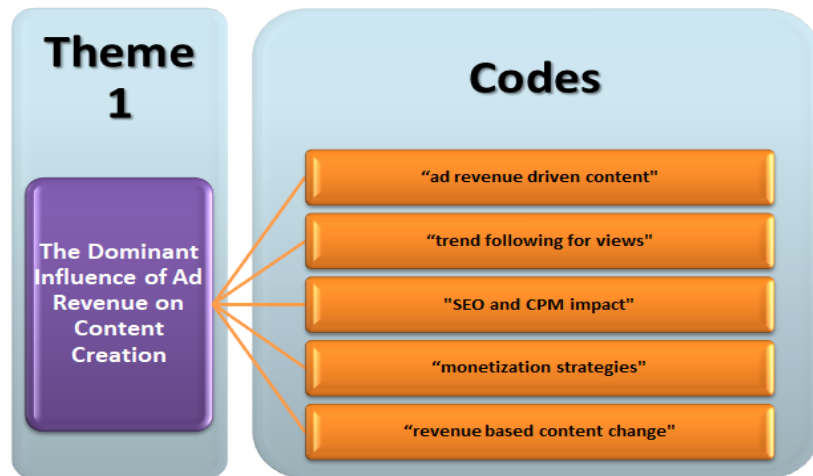


Figure 7. The Dominant Influence of Ad Revenue on Content Creation

The Trade-Off between Revenue and Creative Freedom:

This theme explores the tension that arises when content creators navigate between creative autonomy and financial incentives. Participants expressed differing priorities—some driven by income generation, while others emphasised authenticity, audience trust, or personal vision over monetary rewards.

Respondent 5 offered a perspective grounded in purpose over profit: *“It doesn’t influence the types of content I create. Since my channel isn’t monetised and I’m focused on building face value in public, I prioritise content that resonates with my audience and reflects my personal goals rather than chasing trends for revenue.”* This illustrates a value-driven approach, where credibility and self-representation outweigh platform incentives.

Other respondents acknowledged that the monetisation landscape, particularly YouTube’s algorithmic structure—can create constraints on creativity. Respondent 4 observed: *“This often happens because platforms like YouTube prioritise content that drives higher engagement... trending topics, sensational headlines, or viral formats. Algorithms are designed to keep viewers on the platform longer, so they push content that attracts clicks, shares, and comments, even if it doesn’t align with my interests.”* This comment reflects the influence of the attention economy, where discoverability is shaped by algorithmic compatibility rather than content originality.

Conversely, some participants embraced monetisation as a motivator for improved content quality. Respondent 1 shared, *“I guess, earning motivates you to create better content.”* Others offered more ambiguous responses, suggesting scepticism or resignation toward the system. Respondent 7 said, *“It’s up to you if you want to watch them or not. The platform shows it... if I start answering why, my response would never end.”* Respondent 8 remarked, *“Nope, I’m not following any trend.”* Meanwhile,

Respondent 10 pointed out systemic limitations, stating, *“Small and new online content creators never got a platform where their hard work is rewarded enough.”*

These reflections highlight the complex dynamics between self-expression, algorithmic favourability, and economic viability in the YouTube creator ecosystem.

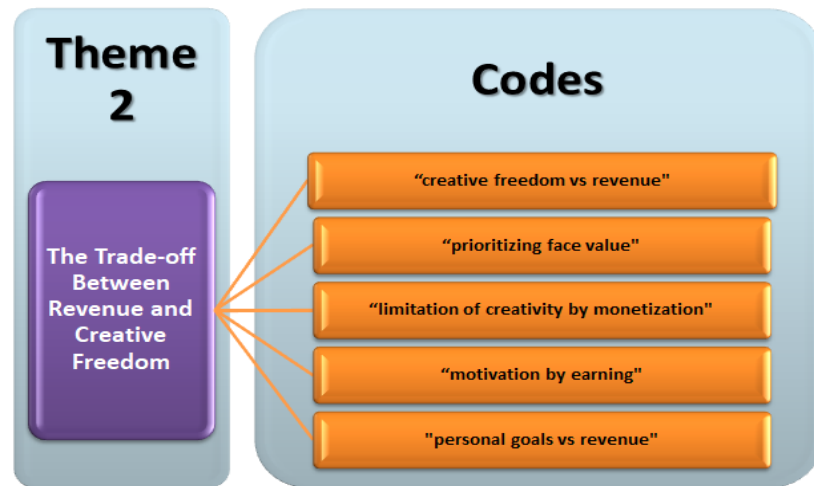


Figure 8. The Trade-Off between Revenue and Creative Freedom

The Algorithm’s Role in Promoting Trending or Sensational Content:

This theme underscores the substantial role played by YouTube’s algorithm in shaping content visibility and trend formation. Most respondents agreed that the platform’s algorithm is designed to promote content that generates high engagement, particularly videos that are controversial, emotionally charged, or viral in nature. This prioritisation often sidelines niche or original content, potentially reducing the diversity of perspectives available to viewers.

Respondent 1 reflected this concern by stating, *“Exactly, you can see daily vlogs as an example. People like to watch controversy; they watch it more, so it becomes part of the algorithm.”* Similarly, respondent 3 noted, *“Yeah, sometimes their content is useless. Still, it gets visibility just because they’ve grabbed attention.”* Respondent 5 added, *“Yeah, the algorithm promotes controversial content because it gets more engagement.”*

Others echoed these sentiments with more general observations. Respondent 4 commented that *“the algorithm promotes viral formats,”* while respondent 6 stated simply, *“It is because of analytics.”*

However, not all respondents viewed the algorithm in a wholly negative light. Respondent 7 shared, *“A good influencer will provide their audience with things they’ve learned. For example, Dhruv Rathee has consistently delivered excellent content.”* Conversely, respondent 10 suggested structural

improvements: “It’s a very difficult algorithm, it should be slightly changed. It should be easier for new creators.” These views illustrate the perceived tension between algorithmic optimisation and fair content discovery, particularly for emerging creators.

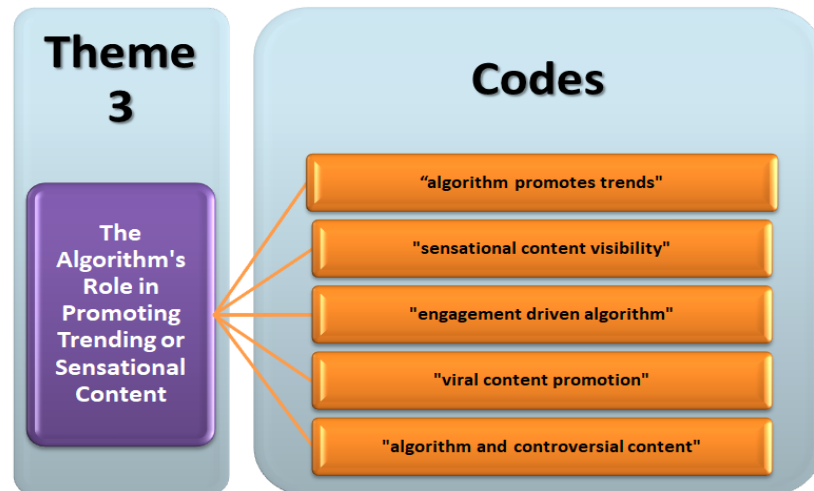


Figure 9. The Algorithm’s Role in Promoting Trending or Sensational Content

The Hierarchical Structure of the Online Content Creator Community on YouTube: This theme examines the perceived power structures within the YouTube creator ecosystem. Many participants recognised the presence of informal hierarchies shaped by subscriber count, earning potential, and platform visibility. These hierarchies often afford greater opportunities to established creators, while simultaneously presenting challenges for newer or smaller channels. On the other hand, hierarchy can suppress diverse voices and increase the pressure to maintain visibility. Such dynamics align with Abidin’s (2020) notion of ‘visibility labour’, where creators invest in maintaining online presence to remain competitive.

Respondent 1 acknowledged this dynamic, stating, “To some extent, yes, there is such a hierarchy.” Respondent 4 was more direct: “Yes, YouTube has hierarchy. More subscribers, more earning, more influence. Small creators have more challenges because top-tier creators have more influence.” Others commented on how popularity can alter creators’ self-perception. Respondent 3 remarked, “Yeah, some people start thinking they are celebrities. The more popular they are, the more of a big celebrity they think they are. Then they degrade small creators.”

While respondent 2 offered a more neutral view, “I don’t know, I’m a new YouTuber, but I guess it’s up to you how you handle the content and audience”, the overall sentiment suggested that these hierarchies produce real consequences. Respondent 3 added, “Once they gain fame, they even change their content theme and suppress new creators. Whatever they post goes viral.” Respondent 4

echoed this, saying, “*Big creators control the trends. It makes everything the same, and small creators get lost.*” Respondent 6 also noted copycat behaviour: “*People, without knowing the reality, just start copying those famous creators.*”

Finally, respondent 7 highlighted regional disparities in monetisation: “*YouTube doesn’t pay you as much in Pakistani currency as it does abroad. Here, you can earn better money through brands.*” These responses reflect a content economy shaped not only by platform algorithms but also by social stratification and symbolic capital.

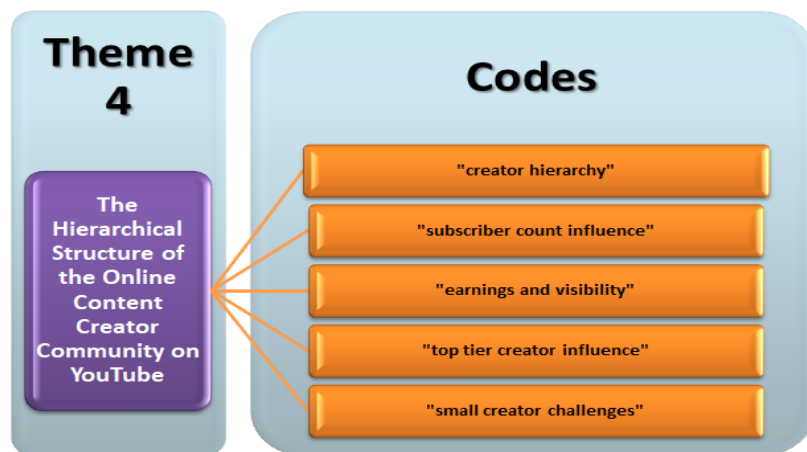


Figure 10. The Hierarchical Structure of the Online Content Creator Community on YouTube

The Impact of “Earn on YouTube” Culture on Creator Interactions:

This theme explores how monetisation culture on YouTube affects the interpersonal dynamics among content creators. While the platform provides opportunities for collaboration, the financial stakes associated with success often result in heightened competition, with creators prioritising individual growth over community engagement.

Respondent 1 summarised this sentiment succinctly: “*It’s competition.*” Respondent 2 echoed this, stating, “*Yeah, in so many ways.*” Similarly, respondent 3 observed, “*Not collaboration, but yeah, competition for sure. Very few online content creators collaborate. Most of them want to do it all by themselves.*”

These comments suggest that economic incentives can discourage knowledge-sharing and foster isolation among creators. However, not all perspectives were entirely negative. Respondent 7 provided a nuanced reflection: “*An ego can make a person very unpleasant both inside and out. A neutral creator who focuses on their work and provides good content will never develop an ego related to earning. But a bad creator will have a parallel issue and will suffer significant consequences. Every*

rose has its fall. Supportive communities and cross-promotion can create a collaborative environment.” Respondent 10 added a logistical concern: *“Before collaboration and all, you should at least tell the employees how to work on it.”* While this comment is less clear, it reflects the structural or organisational challenges faced by smaller creators seeking partnership.

Overall, the findings reveal a community shaped by both aspirational collaboration and competitive pressure, driven by metrics-based validation and monetisation potential.

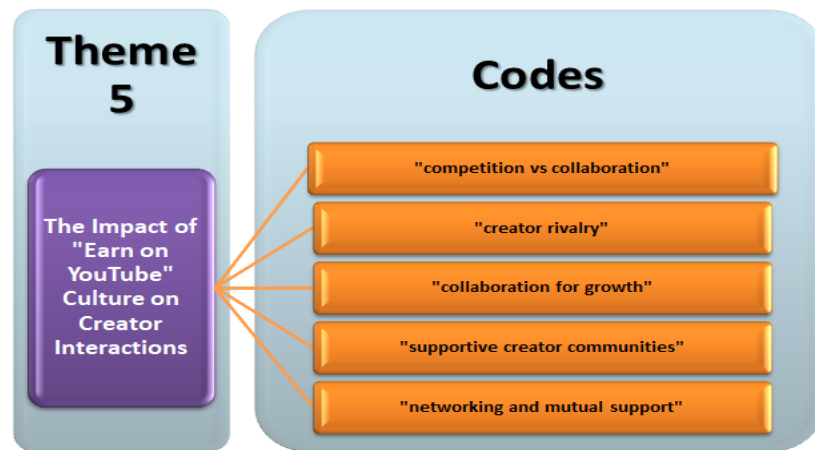


Figure 11. The Impact of “Earn on YouTube” Culture on Creator Interactions

The Prevalence of Sensational and Misleading Content

This theme highlights ethical concerns surrounding the pursuit of views and revenue on YouTube. Some creators prioritise sensational or misleading content strategies in order to attract attention, compromising accuracy and eroding public trust in the platform.

Respondent 3 offered a stark observation: *“For their earning, many creators use their family, speak abusively, make useless content, blame each other, fake fights or pranks—like Ducky and Sistrology.”*

Similarly, respondent 6 remarked, *“Yes, almost every single day.”* Respondent 10 expressed deeper concern: *“Nobody should sell their self-respect for money, but now on social media, it’s happening. You can make any sensational content for views—criticise people, politicise home matters, and get famous. We have to change this. People, especially content creators, need to be educated on how to use such platforms responsibly.”* These insights reflect the growing tension between economic gain and ethical content production on digital platforms.

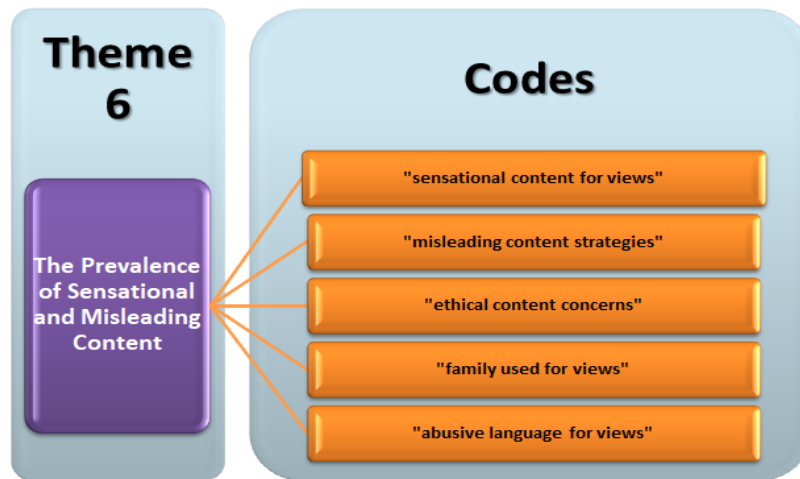


Figure 12. The Prevalence of Sensational and Misleading Content

Concerns about Misinformation and Disinformation

This theme captures respondents' concerns about the spread of misinformation and disinformation on YouTube, particularly in the context of monetised content and its potential impact on trust and societal norms. Participants not only acknowledged the prevalence of false information but also suggested a variety of strategies to curb its influence.

Several respondents highlighted the importance of technological intervention. For instance, Respondent 1 suggested:

"I think AI should be used to verify the information with references." Respondent 2 proposed stricter oversight: *"By taking action and setting rules and regulations."* Respondent 3 added, *"YouTube should control fake monetisation and assign representatives to provide proper guidelines."*

However, not all respondents were optimistic about YouTube's ability to solve the problem. Respondent 7 offered a more philosophical perspective:

"This is one of the biggest internet platforms, where this issue will never fully go away. Just as evil never fully disappears and keeps growing over time, misinformation and disinformation will continue to spread. However, an educated youth and a well-informed family will never adopt content that is unsuitable for them."

In contrast, other respondents advocated for educational solutions. For example, Respondent 10 suggested:

“It would take a lot of time to control these problems if YouTube doesn’t tell YouTubers how to work. YouTube should arrange sessions or free courses to save time and guide creators.”

Interestingly, some participants displayed a limited understanding of how misinformation circulates or the platform's underlying mechanisms. When asked for solutions, they responded with “no idea”, suggesting a knowledge gap that could lead them to unknowingly spread or consume false content. This underscores the need for broader media literacy initiatives and training tailored to new or emerging content creators.

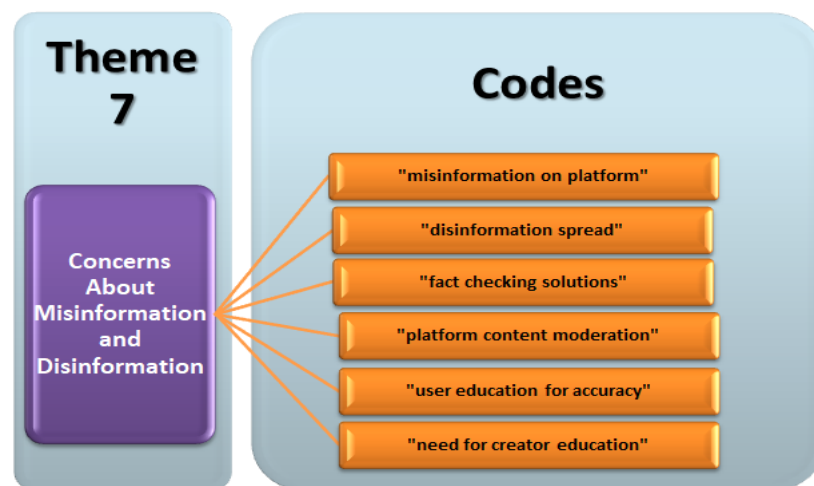


Figure 13. Concerns about Misinformation and Disinformation

Contextualising the Findings with Past Research

This study explored three main issues: content homogenisation, the emergence of online celebrity culture, and the erosion of trust due to monetised misinformation. These themes were also reflected in prior scholarly literature.

While this research highlights the potential for homogenisation of content driven by revenue-focused algorithms, Röchert et al. (2019) found that YouTube users often engage with content that challenges their viewpoints, debunking the idea that the platform merely creates echo chambers.

However, Pietrobruno (2016) argued that algorithms embedded in YouTube's monetisation system play a pivotal role in shaping online celebrity culture. The platform’s design privileges content

types aligned with advertiser interests, thus reinforcing certain creator behaviours and suppressing others. This view is supported by Juntiwasarakij (2018), who offered a theoretical framework on "celebritisation", exploring how sociocultural forces drive online fame. Redmond (2015) extended this analysis by showing how online celebrity culture affects fans emotionally and sensorially, suggesting that platform dynamics impact not just creators, but also audiences.

The concern over monetisation leading to harmful or exploitative content is reinforced by Chu et al. (2022), who noted that "exploitative monetisation" practices and circumvention of platform requirements could erode trust in the information ecosystem.

Although Pietrobruno (2016) challenged the notion that YouTube strictly homogenises content, a more recent study by Nechushtai et al. (2023) found that YouTube's sorting mechanisms strongly homogenise user exposure to information, particularly in top-ranked results. This supports the research question regarding how revenue pressures shape the types of content creators produce—particularly as monetisation depends on attracting mass viewership, which algorithmic curation enables.

Further reinforcing this, Bishop (2020) examined how platform experts train creators to become "algorithmically compliant." This pressure leads to content standardisation, as creators must adhere to what the algorithm rewards. Similarly, Sylvia and Moody (2022) observed that creators adapt to algorithmic incentives, leading to reduced diversity in content forms—what they term the "*homogenisation force*."

In addressing the hierarchies within the YouTube creator ecosystem, Sámelová (2020) discussed how online celebrity formation creates new power structures, with every user potentially branding themselves as a celebrity. This supports the finding in the current study that earning potential and audience size determine visibility and influence among creators.

As for misinformation and disinformation, Sylvia and Moody (2022) argued that algorithms not only homogenise content but may also contribute to radicalisation, with some creators manipulating the system to promote conspiratorial narratives. Cazzamatta (2024), in a study on fact-checking and platform governance, concluded that social media platforms must adopt stronger policy enforcement mechanisms to police misinformation effectively.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the influence of YouTube's monetisation model on content creation in Pakistan, it is limited by its small sample size and geographic focus on Karachi. The

use of a purposive sampling method and a relatively narrow respondent demographic may also limit the generalisability of the findings. Future studies could broaden the sample to include a more diverse range of creators from different regions, income brackets, and content genres. Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches may further validate the thematic patterns uncovered here. Additionally, longitudinal research could explore how content strategies and platform dynamics evolve over time as monetisation policies and algorithmic governance continue to shift.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the pressure to earn on YouTube significantly influences the nature of content produced and promoted on the platform. In pursuit of higher revenue, content creators tend to align their material with algorithmic preferences, often prioritising engagement-driven content over creativity or authenticity. As a result, YouTube's algorithm incentivises content types that are more likely to go viral, thus encouraging homogeneity.

Furthermore, YouTube has fostered a new form of digital hierarchy, wherein creators with greater subscriber counts and higher earnings wield disproportionate influence. These social hierarchies marginalise smaller or emerging creators, limiting diversity in representation and content perspectives. The study also found that the drive to monetise can compromise content integrity, leading to the spread of sensational or misleading content. In contexts like Pakistan, where youth are particularly susceptible to digital influence, such trends may adversely impact societal trust and media literacy. It is recommended that YouTube recalibrate its algorithm to encourage diversity and penalise disinformation more effectively. In parallel, the platform should implement more robust educational initiatives, particularly targeted at emerging creators, to promote ethical content creation. The findings of this study hold implications for platform developers, creators, policy-makers, and **end users**, particularly in developing countries where digital content significantly shapes public opinion and cultural norms.

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