

Peripheral Creator Cultures in India, Ireland, and Turkey

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Abstract

Drawing on Indian, Irish, and Turkish YouTube creators' perceptions of their work, this article focuses on peripheral creator work cultures to broaden the understanding of creator labor precarity. We situate creator labor within not only the platform architectures but also within the geographical specificities of media production, distribution, and consumption. In doing so, we demonstrate that peripheral creators face distinctive struggles for visibility and survival in screen industries that emerge from their heterogeneous sociocultural and linguistic contexts. Based on the interviews with creators and streaming service executives conducted between 2017 and 2023, the findings reveal that creators' choice of language and place of practice distinctly affects their global reach, visibility, and their ability to sustain a career in screen industries.

Keywords

peripheral creator cultures, social media entertainment, precarity, creative labor, algorithmic cultures

Introduction

In nearly two decades, social media entertainment (SME) has facilitated new industrial practices of diverse, relatively empowered, and yet precarious, creators native to social media platforms (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) who emerged outside the broadcasting and digital platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar) sector (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). The SME industries typically differ from the legacy media industries such as film and television, whose industrial logics are dominated by mass distribution and mass audiences and digital platforms which distribute professionally produced film and television content (Lobato, 2019). Rather, SME is populated by creators broadly referring to “native social media entrepreneurs” such as short-video producers, vloggers, and stand-up comedians who are afforded global distribution of creative media and monetization tools through SME (Cunningham & Craig, 2021). Creators use social media platforms to distribute (audio) visual content and consider this as a “calling card” to move across screen industries (Mehta, 2023). This, however, comes with various challenges since creator labor is precarious due to “insecure, contingent, flexible” conditions of social media work (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3). Despite distributing media artifacts via global platforms, how creators experience and mitigate precarity that comes from multiple sources varies greatly depending on the geographic specificities of media production. In this article, drawing on Indian,

Irish, and Turkish creators' perceptions of their work, we focus on peripheral creator cultures to provide more nuanced insights into the precariousness of creator labor.

Our aim in focusing peripheral creator cultures is to trace the dynamics of media work cultures within networks of localized production relations and to elucidate how a particular group of creators “make culture, and, in the process, make themselves into particular kinds of workers” within the SME industries (Mayer et al., 2009, p. 2). What requires considerable attention in such exploration is the fact that creator cultures built around SME “are thoroughly global, regional, and nationally specific in extent and diversity” (Cunningham & Craig, 2021, pp. 13–14). While there are certainly some unifying practices shared by creators globally, creator labor is situated in diverse regional, national, and local media production, circulation, and reception contexts as much as in the global platform architectures. This is because creator cultures are intrinsically tied to diverse governance and regulatory frameworks, heterogeneous sociocultural and linguistic contexts, technological differences affecting levels of access and participation in SME, as well as the wider (in)formal

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media industries structures. In this sense, the term peripheral creator cultures refers to particular ways of the work life of content creators, acknowledging the diversity in their labor practices shaped by their contexts of media production, distribution, and consumption at the peripheries. Understanding this diversity is essential to revealing the different kinds of creator struggles that exist across various creator work cultures.

While previous research conducted in non-Western contexts has addressed the localization of platformed cultural production (Punathambekar & Mohan, 2021) around issues such as (self)censorship (Craig et al., 2021) and “tensions between local cultural norms and international industry practices” (Limkangvanmongkol & Abidin, 2019, p. 96), less attention has been paid to how localized labor conditions create new factors in precarity. Scholars focusing on creator labor precarity have centered on how platforms and their algorithms create uncertainties (Cotter, 2019; Duffy, 2020; Glatt, 2023). Our conceptualization of peripheral creator cultures, on the contrary, provides a broader lens to examine precarious working conditions, highlighting the interconnectedness between creator labor and the larger context in which it exists. By closely examining the creative digital labor practices of creators within the complexities of their production cultures, we contribute to “nested precarities” experienced by creators globally across three distinct levels of markets (audience expectations, competition, advertising demand), platforms (platform features and algorithms), and industries (evolution of platform ecology) (Duffy et al., 2021). Building on their work, we introduce how the effects of heterogeneous sociocultural and linguistic contexts aggravate peripheral creators’ precarity, while also resulting in innovative survival strategies.

Within this framework, we specifically examine peripheral creator cultures in India, Ireland, and Turkey. Despite being significantly different in their economic, political, sociocultural, religious, and linguistic contexts as well as the size and scope of their screen industries, these countries nevertheless share a peripheral status in the context of SME. Indian, Irish, and Turkish YouTube creators, operating outside socioeconomic networks of legacy media industries, are located at the digital peripheries and therefore struggle for opportunities. The term digital periphery refers to their place in the SME industries, which is determined by geographic specificities of mediascapes wherein traditional barriers to media globalization affecting media flows such as language, differences in cultural taste, and identity are still relevant in digital media markets (Havens & Lotz, 2017). Besides our focus on the diverse sociocultural and linguistic contexts of these countries, we also situate creator labor within YouTube’s platform architectures. While YouTube is the first platform, and the most prominent user-generated content platform till date, to offer a view-based monetization scheme, international visibility, branded content, bootcamps to sustain and nurture creators into creating long

form content, the SME built around YouTube “is highly unequal . . . and structured along dividing lines such as language, subject area, and so forth” (Rieder et al., 2023, p. 2). Our cohort of creators aspire to develop and sustain a career in screen industries (Duffy, 2017) and engage in multi-platform content creation to circumvent precarity. YouTube, however, remains the preferred social media platform among the research participants as it exists at the intersection of legacy media and digital platforms and has enabled mobility of creators, content, and genres in countries like India and Brazil (Cunningham et al., 2022).

While YouTube brings advantages to global creator cultures, it remains a fertile ground for sustaining imbalances in media flows, prevailing asymmetrical dependencies between the hegemonic West and peripheral nations in areas of content generation, distribution, and interface. The perpetuation of power imbalances on digital platforms allows those with access to capital among local and global entities to prevail (Jin, 2017; Schiller, 1999). We argue that India, Turkey, and Ireland emerge as a digital periphery wherein the production and distribution relations among international companies, transnational media conglomerates, and local elites marginalize the cultural production in SME and its economic potential despite its size and scale. For example, Indian regional language creators struggle for visibility and audience as they face overwhelming competition with the Hindi-language content market (Hardy, 2010; Ingle, 2017; Mehta, 2020). Despite being among the top TV drama exporters in the world (Kaptan & Algan, 2020), the SME industries in Turkey have a peripheral status as creators, unlike the legacy media industries, do not have access to professional translation and dubbing services, appealing predominantly to Turkish-speaking audiences, and hindering their ability to compete in the global SME market. Moreover, they compete with the legacy media industries for visibility on YouTube within their less lucrative national advertising market. In Ireland, cultural industries, particularly the audio-visual sector, have been one of the main sectors for employment and revenue generation. The Irish state, therefore, strives to integrate Ireland into global media networks with its tax incentives and supportive policies, leading to the emergence of Ireland as a hub for film and television production (O’Brien, 2019). However, this does not eliminate Ireland’s peripheral status in SME because Irish creator cultures are located in a small country where there is a small community of creators and a lack of supportive initiatives to foster the creator economy. In addition, Irish creators, despite producing English-language content, experience algorithmic uncertainties and securing cultural relevance in their content decisions to develop a large audience base despite the platform’s affordance of global content distribution.

Situating creator labor within the geographic specificities of these countries and shifting the analysis of creator cultures from the core to the peripheries, we examine how creators experience and cope with layered precarities in diverse and

similar ways. Our creators' perceptions of their work within these heterogeneous sociocultural and linguistic contexts serve as reference points to demonstrate the multiplicities of precarious labor that peripheral creators must undergo in their conquest to develop a sustainable career in the SME industries. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that their peripheral positions are fixed and permanent as "peripheral places can be sites for creativity and innovation" (Power & Collins, 2021, p. 1154). We also pay attention to unique risk management strategies of peripheral creators in developing content, audience expectations, and algorithmic uncertainty. In doing so, the article aims for theory building grounded in the subjective realities of peripheral creators regarding the challenges of their work. We argue that the precariousness of content creation comes from multiple sources that are not necessarily economic, requiring peripheral creators to develop various strategies that are informed by their local as well as platformized experiences to survive in SME.

Method

The data presented in this article are part of a larger project that maps the influence of digital platforms on the creator economy. The data were gathered through a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews, including in-person, email, phone, and WhatsApp interviews between 2017 and 2023. The dataset collected over a period of 5 years allowed us to map both the systemic and contemporary issues, as well as the creators' adaptive practices in response to algorithmic changes on YouTube. The research participants recruited via a combination of purposive and snowball sampling are diverse, including various actors engaging in SME who are at different career stages, work with different employment contracts, and produce content in various media genres. The full list of interviewees can be found in the Appendix.

The interviews, lasting between 40 min and 2 hr, were conducted in English, Turkish, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, and Bengali depending on the participants' comfort over the choice of language. We analyzed the interview data in their original languages to avoid loss of meaning and non-English interview excerpts were translated into English only when presenting the data. Due to the professional proficiency of at least one of us in at least one language, except Bengali, we were able to retain cultural and contextual nuances particular to such languages in asking questions related to content creation practices, transcribing interviews, and translating interview excerpts. A translator was hired to interview one Bengali language creator who, admittedly, could not speak any other language with proficiency.

The Indian sample consists of creators (N: 45) such as vloggers, stand-up comedians, actors, directors, and producers who upload content such as sketches, web series, short films, and stand-up specials in SME. It also includes intermediaries such as talent agents and multi-channel networks (N: 9) and streaming media executives (N: 14) from YouTube

and Netflix among other services. Such a motley of diverse practitioners is indicative of the diverse talent that the platform attracts and, in any case, crucial in India's case where SME acts as a conduit for select creators to exhibit their talent in their conquest for a sustainable career across the screen industries.

In India, Marathi, English, Hindi, Gujarati, and Tamil language creators from Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, and Ahmedabad were interviewed across four waves. In the first wave, three semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted in Mumbai and Ahmedabad with the exception of one WhatsApp interview as one respondent was on tour. Ten email interviews were conducted between October 2017 and January 2018 as we were researching from abroad; 48 semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted in Mumbai and Kolkata between March and August 2018. Finally, the remaining interviews were conducted over Zoom in 2022 with the exception of one telephonic interview in June 2023.

In Ireland, seven interviews, five of them in-person and two of them online over MS Teams due to public health measures during the pandemic, were conducted between November 2019 and June 2020. At the time of the research, none of the Irish participants, except one who used to work in a production house (PH), were able to generate a livable income from YouTube media production. Thus, six of the Irish creators were aspirational and had other income sources coming from their full-time or freelance jobs.

In Turkey, nine interviews, six of them in-person and three of them online over MS Teams due to public health measures during the pandemic, were conducted between December 2019 and June 2020. At the time of the research, all Turkish participants were making a sustainable full-time income from YouTube media production. While two of them were independent creators, seven of them were working in the context of a PH with different and sometimes multiple titles such as a manager, a founder, a content editor, a director, a production manager, a content head, and a YouTube creator.

We relied on a *posteriori* combination of qualitative data, meaning that the analysis is carried out after conducting fieldwork in each country (Gingrich, 2012). This provided us with the advantage of collecting data by contextualizing each case within specific media landscapes of these countries without the burden of having predefined points for analysis. In this sense, our sample size in each country reflects a proportional representation of creators based on the scale of screen industries in each country given that Indian screen industries, compared with Turkish and Irish screen industries, are larger and more diverse due to their multiple language markets.

When analyzing the data, we did not engage in a formal comparative analysis as that could potentially erase the richness and complexities of each local context to fit into the existing conceptual framework developed in Western contexts (Chua, 2015). Rather, we benefited from an

inter-referencing approach which suggests shifting the analysis to a horizontal plane wherein each context becomes an equal reference point (Chua, 2015; Wagner & Kraidy, 2023). In doing so, the geographic location in this research served as a significant variable, multiplying our frames of reference for theory building grounded in the subjective and localized creator struggles.

Findings: Creator Struggles at the Peripheries

Linguistic Precarity

Historically, among the various barriers to media globalization, language differences among audiences have been one of the major challenges for media producers. This also remains an issue for YouTube creators despite the platform's affordance of global distribution of content. As Cunningham and Craig (2019, p. 247) mention, "one clear continuity with older versions of cultural imperialism is the dominance of the English language in SME. For English-language SME, the world is indeed flatter than for anyone else." Thus, peripheral creators producing non-English language content face linguistic precarity as they cannot easily attain a global viewership moving beyond their language markets, creating more dependency on their local or regional audience communities (Ganti, 2016; Mehta, 2020). To overcome the language barrier, YouTube affords automatic captions and machine translation and encourages its creators to use their own closed captions and subtitles to reach a larger international audience. While some creators engage in the strategic use of subtitles to build interactive global communities (Lee, 2021), machine-generated captions and translations lack accuracy especially in peripheral languages and producing subtitles in different languages requires investing in extra skills, time, and/or money. Therefore, peripheral creators who do not have the motivation and resources to initiate this practice face audience fragmentation due to their choice of language in addition to other factors such as algorithmic cultures in SME and broader cultural differences among audiences.

Among the research participants, Turkish and Indian creators extensively experience linguistic precarity, which creates new inequalities in determining their place within the competitive SME. The Irish participants, on the contrary, do not recognize linguistic precarity in their labor practices as all of them produce English-language content. This could have been different if we were able to recruit creators producing Irish-language content. This is primarily because the Irish-language market is very small as there are 1,873,997 Irish speakers in 2022 according to the latest census of population conducted by the Central Statistics Office (2023) in Ireland.

Within the competitive SME industries, creators in Turkey and India experience audience fragmentation first

and foremost because of their choice of language. For example, Mert considers producing Turkish-language content to be disadvantageous and believes that his content might have greater mass appeal when produced in English as he is part of a specific fan community:

If the content I made was in English, my channel would be much bigger now. At times I wonder if I should prepare English subtitles for the videos that I'm sure will be great, but it is not something that I can spare time for, and I don't have a good enough English to prepare subtitles.

His account highlights extra skills and time required for generating captions and subtitles. Also, most Turkish creators tend not to systematically use automatic captioning and translation as these facilities do not work well for Turkish, similar to other peripheral languages. In addition, YouTube has started to afford adding multi-language audio tracks to videos; this function, however, works more for top-tier creators like MrBeast who "has already dubbed his most popular videos in 11 languages" to bring more international audiences (Campbell, 2023). This is because he is able to afford hiring a team of creators for this particular task.

Similarly, Yigit, producer in PH-2, acknowledges how producing content in the Turkish-language limits the growth and potential of Turkish creators and their ability to reach a wider audience:

That's a huge handicap. If I could do business globally, we would definitely be elsewhere. I can't because the YouTuber [for whom I produce content] doesn't speak English. And even if the YouTuber speaks English, the dynamics and competition in the global [market] are different.

More importantly, Yigit points out another aspect, suggesting that speaking English itself does not directly translate into global mass appeal. Given that the English-language is dominant in SME, non-native English-speaking creators could find themselves in a more competitive market. This is because overcoming cultural barriers such as adapting content to a different market and understanding cultural nuances emerge as new difficulties that are key to success.

Coming to India, home to 121 languages (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022), one witnesses a greater complexity of inequalities among YouTubers that are dictated as much by language as by the place of belonging. The current Indian government's efforts to impose Hindi-language across the Indian states for political ambitions notwithstanding, Hindi is the most spoken language in India. Hindi content's contribution as the highest form of local and global viewership across the film, television, and digital media places Hindi-language YouTube creators looking for finance and visibility at a greater advantage over Bengali and Marathi-language YouTube creators. For example, Sarang Sathaye, co-founder of 1.41M subscriber-driven Marathi YouTube channel "Bhartiya Digital Party" confesses:

Obviously, none of the Marathi-language content on YouTube is getting massive budgets (from brands). They are making videos (web-series) within the range of INR 100,000 to 500,000 per episode whereas channels like TVF (leading Hindi YouTube channel) are making an episode of about INR 50,00,000.

Furthermore, Mumbai's proximity with the Hindi film industry, and its status as a media capital places Hindi-language productions at an advantage over non-Hindi productions in traditional and digital delivery systems alike. Hindi's popularity also perpetuates a sense of neglect among non-Hindi language creators who "prefer to imitate Hindi-language YouTube content" to increase viewership, explains the founder of Bengali-language YouTube channel, Saurav Kar. Moreover, the popularity of the Hindi-language YouTubers also pushes non-Hindi creators toward investing in Hindi-language content, highlighting the additional labor that marginalized creators often undertake to succeed on YouTube. Kar confesses that he began creating Hindi-language content for a brief period to attract a larger audience. This does not only demonstrate peripheral creators' strategic choice of language but also how YouTube's capitalist logic of rewarding success through viewership metrics impels creators of non-mainstream languages toward adopting mainstream languages for survival.

The domination of one language over another also seeps into places and leads creators, emanating from regions speaking non-mainstream languages, to question the taste and aesthetics of their local audience. As Johnson (2008, p. 6) argues, regions are expressed "through aesthetical distinctions and presumptions regarding audience disposition or 'tastes.'" Building on Johnson's assertion, we argue that the politics of language and origin contribute to our understanding of a region's aesthetics. As an example, Kolkata dweller, Tanvi Rajgarhia, popularly referred to as "Jhansi the Drama Queen" in SME for her quirky sketches in English-language, argues that the pathway to a career in entertainment is either by "creating Hindi-language content like Bhuvan Bam for a mass audience or through networking in Mumbai for opportunities." The preference of the Hindi-language and Mumbai's space to succeed in India, further, establishes the nexus of language and spatial politics and its relevance to the digital creator labor. Indrani Biswas, creator of YouTube channel "Wonder Munna," who specializes in creating sketches and vlogs in the Bengali-language suggested that Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore were "the main blocks for doing business within the online space." Biswas, in comparing the difference of creator and viewer patterns between Kolkata and Mumbai argues:

Bengali content creators were really slow in understanding content creation business on social media in comparison to those from the three cities. One of the main reasons for slow acceptability is also the audience. Also, the culture of Kolkata in comparison to any of the three cities is very different. Kolkata is

a very slow city in comparison to cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore in terms of understanding and adopting new business opportunities.

This demonstrates Biswas' assertion about Kolkata's "slow" acceptance to online content creation by other creators emanating from Kolkata. For instance, Kiran Dutta, Kolkata's most popular creator on YouTube, remarks in an interview that his parents "don't understand the concept of YouTube" (quoted in Chakraborty, 2018). Thus, such self-reflexive perceptions among creators highlight how mainstream languages are critical to building a meaningful creative career.

Localizing Algorithmic Precarity

In addition to linguistic differences affecting global distribution of media on YouTube, the algorithmic culture of the platform plays an active role in determining what content gains visibility on the platform. For YouTube creators, algorithmically determined visibility is key to their success as their income is tied to the number of video views. The uncertainty regarding how the platform algorithm works creates "algorithmic precarity" in all creator cultures, exacerbating the instability of platformed cultural production (Duffy, 2020). Due to the mysteries of algorithms, creators try to build knowledge of the algorithm through trial and error, "algorithmic gossip" (Bishop, 2019), or forming "engagement pods" (O'Meara, 2019). They also need to second-guess the YouTube algorithm due to its changeable nature that creates further ambivalences in their labor practices. While such algorithmic anxieties are observable globally, we argue that the consequences of algorithmic precarity are felt differently in peripheral creator cultures, which requires consideration of the wider context.

Peripheral creators producing non-English and/or non-Hindi content face overwhelming competition from the legacy media industries within YouTube's algorithmic cultures, which further increases their precarious working conditions. For instance, Turkish creator Mert mentions his observation on YouTube's algorithmically determined trending page, saying that "when you look at Turkey, 15 videos out of 25 in the trending tab are summary of [TV] series and what will happen in the next episode of the series." Also, the degree of this competition increases even more considering that 4 of the 10 most watched YouTube channels in Turkey belong to the legacy media and 5 are kids content channels, highlighting the importance of genre in generating significant income (Yakar, 2023). Confirming this, Turkish participant Baris, head of content in PH-4, draws attention to the increased competition since 2015:

There were very few YouTube channels, and very few teams producing digital content regularly and professionally. Now there is a lot of competition as television channels, big TV series, and even big celebrities are entering this market.

Within this context, he mentions the necessity of incessant cycle of new content creation and how this affects him:

Like all creatives, you are running out of [ideas], experiencing writer's block, getting tired, getting exhausted by time. . . . You are very worn out because you won't have such a time [to rest] and you have to act professionally. I mean, a singer or a director can rest for a year, but we don't have that chance.

While the necessity of “feeding the hungry algorithm” is similar to other creator cultures (Glatt, 2023), its economic and emotional effects should be examined by taking linguistic precarity into account.

When considered in the context of increased audience fragmentation due to language and competition from the legacy media, peripheral creators who have begun their journey on YouTube have a greater need to engage in multiplatform labor to navigate algorithmic uncertainties. Given that 66% of YouTube's top 250 channels produce English-language content, followed by Spanish (15%) and Portuguese (7%) languages (Gomez, 2023) and YouTube's Cost Per Mile (CPM)—the average cost of thousand ad impressions—revenue is relatively lower in India, Ireland, and Turkey compared with more lucrative advertising markets like the United States and United Kingdom (Lamichhane, 2023), this need becomes clearer. The overwhelming income disparity between peripheral creators earning across platforms and the U.S. creators who monetize on YouTube alone highlights the dire levels of precarity and the significance of visibility among peripheral creators, exacerbating career uncertainties (Daugherty, 2023). Peripheral creators who are already aware of low yields from their advertising markets and of the effects of algorithmic invisibility in decreasing AdSense revenue also engage with non-scalable ways of earning income such as “brand deals, merchandising, television and cable options, live appearances, and licensing content” (Cunningham & Craig, 2019, p. 77). However, visibility still remains an important issue in securing brand deals, which is one of the popular revenue creation options among the research participants. Therefore, creators are extremely sensitive to YouTube channel stats and might guarantee a certain number of video views to brands. Turkish participant Can, manager of PH-1, for example, mentions that his company guarantees 500K video views to potential partners, whereas the PH-2's channel for which Turkish participant Yigit works relies on the high number of video views like 1-4M views in brand deals.

Moreover, YouTube made its debut in India in 2008, arriving 3 years after its launch in the United States in 2005. In addition, its popularity in India progressed relatively slowly due to the nation's ongoing development of digital infrastructure as part of the Digital Welfare program (Mehta, 2023). Consequently, pioneers on YouTube, such as Anirudh Pandita, founder of “PocketAces,” faced challenges in visibility, given that much of YouTube's infrastructure was

initially tailored to cater to Western consumption patterns. For example, Pandita who runs four channels across YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram highlights that he used Facebook to build the community on YouTube. He argues,

We came in at a time when YouTube's front page was completely algorithmically run, the trending was algorithmically run. So, we said, if I put a video up on YouTube, how will I get it to count? How do I get it to be discovered? Back in the day when the initial kind of YouTube stars like TVF (The viral fever) or AIB (All India Bakchod) and in the West there were several others, YouTube would give them discovery. They would put them on the front page of YouTube which had huge traffic. And they would put the YouTube link on Facebook. So, the actual discovery (of the channel) was done on Facebook and not YouTube.

Pandita contends that he crafted concise sketches exclusively for Facebook, derived from lengthy videos shared on YouTube, with the aim of growing his YouTube audience and gain visibility. This strategy necessitated investing in labor and financial resources across multiple platforms to effectively reach the intended audience.

When content distribution is not limited by language as in the case of Irish creators producing English-language content, creators still localize their experiences with the platform's algorithm, which results in a more nuanced understanding of how location impacts their algorithmic imaginaries. While previous research has extensively mentioned how various factors such as content choices, audience size, identity, and age play a role in algorithmic precarity, creating structural inequality for some creators (Glatt, 2023), location has not been much addressed as a factor in algorithmic precarity. For instance, this is how Irish creator Barry explains the role of the algorithm in getting more Irish audience:

The algorithm obviously like location wise would put you into the Irish homepage . . . I think the algorithm just puts you where you are. Especially like if you're putting Irish in the title, Irish in the tags, . . . people [commented on your video] . . . are Irish . . . Then they're like “Oh, this is an Irish creator, well put him to Irish people.”

Thinking in parallel with Barry's point, Luke also thinks that a YouTube channel's location has an effect on the algorithm and thereby determines the audience profile. That is why he changed his channel's location to the United States “as an experiment” as part of the visibility game (Cotter, 2019):

I thought that may have changed something in the algorithm to say “Hey . . . don't just show this to Irish people, try to show this to American people.” . . . That was me trying to figure out the algorithm a bit more. But if I'm to really dig into my analytics, YouTube simply just seems to show my videos to Irish people, and I don't know how to get out of that.

When I asked about the effect of the English language used in his videos for appealing to a global audience, Luke said:

That's the hope in some ways. I try to make . . . English-speaking videos that should appeal to a wide range of English-speaking countries. But I find that the problem with being an Irish YouTuber is that if you don't get your Irish audience to really like your videos, then your videos don't seem to go anywhere and so no one sees them.

In his algorithmic imaginary, he believes that achieving algorithmic visibility on a global scale requires first gaining popularity in the Irish YouTube. This creates a paradox in their labor practices, having a greater need to adapt to dominant cultural affinities in return for greater visibility. This is because appealing to an Irish audience may require producing relatable content involving local trends and inside jokes, which may not guarantee a global audience. To overcome this, they utilize certain strategies such as changing the channel's location to the United States, not putting the word Irish in the video titles and tags, and making content related to the United States. Similarly, Herman and Arora's (2023, p. 11) research on Indian creators demonstrates that creators change their content decisions and aesthetic choices based on their algorithmic imaginaries, indicating that "algorithmic cultures may be encouraging a unified, globalised design language, silencing local cultural norms." These strategies employed by peripheral creators to achieve algorithmic visibility may lead to a loss of diversity in cultural representation, resulting in a trend toward older forms of cultural imperialism.

Content Creation Beyond Borders

Peripheral creators experiencing linguistic and algorithmic precarities develop distinct strategies to increase their visibility and thereby their income. Building on previous research on creators' survival strategies (Mehta, 2020; Nayaka & Reddy, 2022), we demonstrate that our cohort of creators try to surmount linguistic, cultural, and/or algorithmic barriers by engaging in content creation beyond borders. This can be exemplified by several strategies such as collaborating with creators who produce content in different languages, targeting diasporic communities, making content having wider appeal, and diversifying genres. Although they may not necessarily be successful, their constant struggles to find innovative ways to expand their reach and maximize their income potential highlight the increased precarious conditions and their agency in navigating the screen industries.

One way to attain visibility is to develop an international audience which is tied to making content with global appeal. However, the understanding of what constitutes the global context is often skewed toward the Western context, especially the United States. There are obvious financial considerations at stake here given that the YouTube CPM is one of

the highest offered to any creator catering to the U.S. audience (Lamichhane, 2023). Ajay Gupta, CEO, Broccoli Animation, whose enterprise produces visual animation stories in the crime and horror genre from India but for the U.S. audience argues:

1000 views with 70% or more inventory fill (of advertisements) would translate to roughly INR 30 (less than 1 US \$) in my genre if the views came from the Indian audience. The same views and inventory fill percentage would lead to USD 5 if the views come from the U.S. or any other developed country.

As seen in Image 1 demonstrating Broccoli Animation's YouTube analytics, the majority of the audience comes from the United States followed by Canada and the United Kingdom. Half of Gupta's team including the script writers work from the United States and are key to his "cultural relevance," a key point on which we will touch upon later. Gupta also follows the U.S. advertising trends on YouTube to keep abreast with the U.S. YouTube market. This means that the months of November and December are more important than the rest due to the company's preference to "pump a lot of money into ads" around this time. Understanding the play of seasonality, as Gupta shows, is key to survival of peripheral creators targeting Western audiences for financial stability.

However, the search for financial stability on YouTube also comes at the expense of financial precarity at a local level. It is important to understand here that the Government of India levies between 25% and 30% corporate tax on a net income between 10 M and 100 M INR (PwC Worldwide Tax Summaries, 2023). This is followed by an additional 20% (raised from 5% in 2023) on foreign remittance (Das, 2023). A frustrated Gupta argues the high amount of tax he has to shell out for "no benefits."

Turkish creators also highlighted the effect of localized CPM rates within the political economy of YouTube in their labor practices. For the CPM rate changes based on audience profile such as location, Can, manager of PH-1, gives an example:

. . . on our kids' channel, 10% of the views were from Germany, but 30% of the income was coming from Germany. . . . Since the CPM is higher there, [you would earn] more for less views.

His case also confirms that getting views from audiences living in countries where the CPM rates are relatively higher increases creators' income. Due to language barriers, Turkish creators are less advantaged as they may only generate international views from countries such as Germany, where a large Turkish diaspora lives or Azerbaijan where a language closely related to the Turkish language is spoken. In relation to this, Ilgin, production manager in PH-3, highlights another instance demonstrating how their channel gets views from other countries as some of their video formats host TV celebrities:

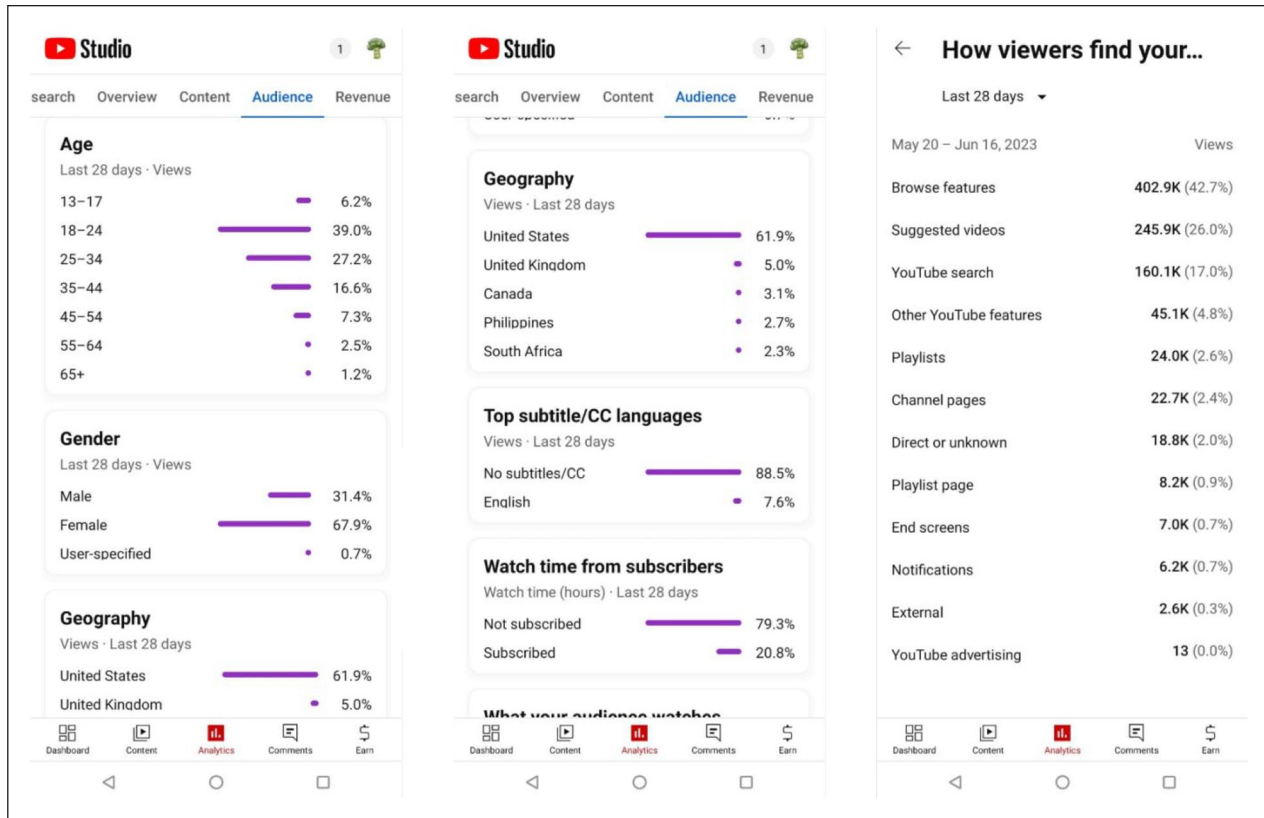


Image 1. Broccoli Animation's YouTube analytics.
Source: Ajay Gupta, CEO, Broccoli Animation.

Our content is watched a lot in the Middle Eastern and South American countries because the Turkish TV series are sold to those countries, and this brings us an audience, but they want subtitles of course. . . . So, we may do this for those fans but it's not something we do right now.

Her case points out how they may benefit from the global viewership of Turkish TV series due to a great size of international sales (Kaptan & Algan, 2020). However, referring back to our point on linguistic precarity, they need to invest money and time for the creation of professional subtitles which in turn does not guarantee compensation.

Acknowledging their linguistic precarity, some Turkish creators consider strategically targeting the Turkish diaspora living in Western countries where the CPM is higher. For example, Ugur, founder of PH-2 mentions:

You earn more money when [your videos] are watched from abroad. We thought for a while about how we can get more views from abroad on the same channel. So, without opening an English channel. Frankly, we thought of targeting the Turks abroad, but we haven't done anything about it yet.

Although they have not put their ideas into practice, developing these strategies demonstrate their constant struggles to survive in this industry.

When it comes to Irish creators, we have already noted that they cannot be assumed to have an advantage just because they primarily produce English-language content as they experience algorithmic precarity. In addition to this, within this global media consumption environment, audiences continue to remain as culturally situated subjects (Jensen & Helles, 2015). That is, for Irish creators, reaching a global audience also comes with challenges such as making relatable content. Most of the Irish creators interviewed for this project could not achieve this kind of global reach. Irish creator Casey, who had successfully attracted the attention of a wider American audience, says:

I actually just built it by accident. I was making so many videos about Irish people and Irish things, and they were actually made for Irish people. And it just turned out that a lot of Americans are really, really interested in content about Ireland. . . . Then, I probably built a bit more because I started to talk about more worldwide issues as well. So, I did a few videos on Trump. . . . I probably also have a benefit in that, like, my accent isn't too thick to understand, you know? So, I think that probably . . . helped me build up an American following because they can actually understand what I'm saying.

While her point about her unplanned success in building an international audience alludes to the unknowability of the

algorithm, the strategic content choices she made later demonstrates her agency in maintaining the attention of her audience on her channel.

A further point related to cultural relevance made by Irish creators demonstrates the significance of media genres in making content across borders. As Havens and Lotz (2017, p. 226) note, “the main distinction between media content that can and cannot travel well abroad is the degree to which that content relies on language to communicate.” This highlights the significance of certain media genres in overcoming language and cultural barriers for global distribution of media content. Most popular Irish YouTube creators, for example, produce gameplay content which is more accessible to a wider English-speaking audience. This is because online video game culture creates its own language as gamers develop “unique communication styles using a game-specific language form” (Bawa, 2018, p. 2714). Irish creator Barry describing himself as “in real life vlogger” whose fame comes from “making Irish relatable content” states that:

Gaming is different because it’s a lot more general, because everyone plays games, but not everyone in America wants to watch a video of me going to Centra buying a chicken fillet roll because they just can’t relate to that, but they can relate to someone playing Minecraft.

In this sense, Barry acknowledges his disadvantage in producing daily vlogs and again strategically considers diversifying genres by making gameplay content as a survival strategy.

Conclusion

Although SME has ushered in a new era of media globalization by leveraging the socio-technical capabilities of platforms for worldwide creation, dissemination, and reception of media content, it falls short of establishing a uniform creator work culture on a global scale. This is primarily because platformed cultural production is very much situated in the platform architectures, the wider screen industries, and the broader sociocultural, linguistic, and economic contexts of distinct geographies. Focusing on peripheral creator cultures alleviates the risk of homogenizing diverse experiences of creators embedded in their own local, regional, and national media production contexts. Thus, we contribute to the previous research on SME (Cunningham & Craig, 2019) and creator labor that have extensively focused on economic and algorithmic precarities within the political economy of SME (Bishop, 2019; Duffy et al., 2021).

Our research presented in this article demonstrates that peripheral creators in India, Ireland, and Turkey face distinctive and significant struggles for exposure and survival by highlighting the implications of language and region on their precarious labor practices. They are often discriminated

against within the media circuits due to their choice of language and place of belonging, creating linguistic precarity in their labor practices and fuelling their career concerns. While they experience audience fragmentation affecting their income, linguistic precarity also makes them more dependent on their specific language communities. Furthermore, part of their precarious working conditions comes from the ambivalence and unpredictability of the YouTube algorithm similar to other creator cultures. However, they have a greater need to engage in multi-platform labor, to attain visibility on YouTube’s algorithmic cultures for securing brand deals, to compete with the legacy media for audience attention within their language markets, and to adapt to dominant cultural affinities. Finally, to navigate linguistic, cultural, algorithmic barriers, peripheral creators find themselves in a constant struggle to create content beyond borders as a distinct survival strategy. Overall, we have shown that creator precarity not only comes from the organization of economic relations in SME but also from the heterogeneous sociocultural and linguistic contexts that shape the media production, distribution, and consumption landscapes. Language and region thus become important nodes to address the challenges faced by peripheral creators and to understand the platform’s role in perpetuating the unequal distribution of media content.

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Appendix

Table A1. Interview participants in India.

S. No.	Respondent	Designation	Company	Profile
1	Vishal Chopra	Supervising Producer	IOI Media	Content creator
2	Abhijit Deb	Creative Producer	ZEE5	SVoD executive
3	Anirudh Pandit	Co-founder	Pocket Aces	Content creator
4	Sidharth Anand	Vice-President, Films and National TV	SaReGaMaPa	Content creator (web series, movies)
5	Pankaj Mandal	Head of Digital Marketing	OML	Intermediary
6	Anuvab Pal	Writer—web series, films	Independent	Content creator
7	Chhavi Mittal	Founder	SIT	Online media company
8	Indranil Chakraborty	CEO	Big Synergy	Content creator
9	Sunil Nair	COO	ALTBalaji	SVoD executive
10	Navin Kasturia	Freelancer	Independent	Actor, content creator
11	Amit Singh	Executive Producer	Times Network, Ex Culture Machine (MCN)	Content creator
12	Amrit Raj Gupta	Associate Creative Director, TVF; YouTube Channel Head, Screenpatti	Screenpatti, TVF	Content creator
13	Ankur Dobriyal	Creative Post Producer	ScoopWhoop	Content creator
14	D Girish	Head of Content	Spuul	SVoD executive
15	Datta Dave	Founder	Tulsea Pictures	Intermediary
16	Dhruv Sehgal	Senior Content Creator	Dice Media	Content creator
17	Durjoy Chowdhury	Online Content Creator, Indie Music	Friday Night Originals	Content creator
18	Eklavya Bhattacharya	Chief Strategy Officer	ALTBalaji	SVoD executive
19	Gaurav Gandhi	Group Head, Amazon Prime	VOOT, Amazon Prime	Ex-COO, VOOT; Group Head, Amazon Prime
20	Gurpreet Singh	Co-founder	One Digital Entertainment	Intermediary
21	Jhanvi	Freelancer	The Drama Queen	Content creator
22	Jigisha Mistry	Head, Mumbai	YouTube Spaces	YouTube executive
23	Karandeep Jaiswal	Creator	Independent	Content creator
24	Kopal Khanna	Founder	Tape A Tale	Content creator
25	Nabh Gupta	Marketing Director	Amazon Prime	SVoD executive
26	Nidhi Bisht	Creative Director	TVF	Content creator
27	Niyati Merchant	VP Product and Business Head	Arré	Content creator
28	Padmini Kutty	Founder	Founder, Vaishnavee Mediaworks Ltd	Content creator
29	Prateek Raina	Independent	Independent	Content creator
30	Prem Mistry	Creative Director	TVF	Content creator
31	Raica Mathews	Director	OML	Intermediary
32	Rajiv Mehra	Co-founder	Addatimes	SVoD channel founder
33	Rohan Joshi	Content Creator	AIB	Content creator
34	Saurav Kar	Regional Content Creator	The Bong Guy	Content creator
35	Shantanu Tungare	Chief Creative Officer	Revolt Art Technology	Content creator
36	Sidharth Jain	Founder	The Story Ink (Former Hot Star)	Intermediary
37	Soumya Mukherjee	General Manager—Operations	Hoichoi	SVoD executive
38	The Bong Guy (Sourav Kar)	Independent	The Bong Guy (YouTube channel)	Content creator
39	Tracy D Souza	Channel Head, TVF Girliyapa	TVF	Content creator
40	Trishan	Founder	Indian Casting Company	Casting agent
41	Vaibhav Kumar	Business Head	Jio Cinema	SVoD executive
42	Vishnu Mohta	Co-founder	Hoichoi	SVoD executive
43	Indrani Biswas	Independent	Independent	Content creator
44	Jyoti Das	Independent	Independent	Content creator
45	Sidharth Ravindran	Marketing Manager	Netflix	SVoD executive
46	Devashish Makhija	Independent	Independent	Content creator
47	Rasika Duggal	Independent	Independent	Actress in Netflix, Amazon Prime, TVF, YT, Bollywood content

(Continued)

Table A1. (Continued)

S. No.	Respondent	Designation	Company	Profile
48	Abhishek Banerjee	Co-founder	Casting Bay	Casting agent
49	Sarang Sathaye	BhaDiPa co-founder	BhaDiPa	Content creator
50	Sameer Pitalwala	CEO, Cultural Machine	Cultural Machine	Intermediary
51	R. Madhavan	Independent	Independent	Actor, producer
52	Aditi Mittal	Independent	Independent	Content creator
53	Anirban Dasgupta	Independent	Independent	Content creator—stand-up comedy, web series
54	Anup Kadam	Producer	Voot	SVoD executive
55	Arunesh Kripal	Senior Creative Producer	Qyuki	Intermediary
56	Atul Khatri	Independent	Independent	Content creator
57	Nikunj Lotia	Founder	Be YouNick (YouTube)	Content creator
58	Brahma Raval	Founder	Yo Yo Gujarati (YouTube)	Content creator
59	Nikhil Taneja	Head	Y Films (YouTube)	Content creator
60	Nijo Johnson	Founder	Purani Dilli Talkies (YouTube)	Content creator
61	Sidharth Alambayan	Creative Head	Times Internet Ltd	Content creator
62	Sidharth Dudeja	Independent	Sidharth Dudeja (YouTube channel)	Content creator
63	Sorabh Pant	Independent	Sorabh Pant (YouTube channel)	Content creator
64	Tanya Chamoli	Independent	Tanya Chamoli (YouTube channel)	Content creator
65	Vaibhav Sethia	Independent	Vaibhav Sethia (YouTube channel)	Content creator
66	Karandeep Jaiswal	Independent	Independent	Content creator
67	Ajay Gupta	CEO	Broccoli Animations (YouTube Channel)	Content creator
68	Madhuri Kumar	Freelance writer	TVF (YouTube channel)	Content creator

Table A2. Interview participants in Turkey.

S. No.	Respondent (pseudonym)	Designation	Company	Profile
1	Can	Manager	PH-1	Content creator
2	Alp	Content Editor	PH-1	Content creator
3	Yigit	Director, Producer	PH-1, PH-2	Content creator
4	Ugur	Founder	PH-2	Content creator
5	Deniz	Creator	PH-2	Content creator
6	Ilgin	Production Manager	PH-3	Content creator
7	Baris	Head of Content	PH-4	Content creator
8	Mert	Independent	Independent	Content creator
9	Elif	Independent	Independent	Content creator

Table A3. Interview participants in Ireland.

S. No.	Respondent (pseudonym)	Designation	Company	Profile
1	Conor	Independent	Independent	Content creator
2	Aoife	Independent	Independent	Content creator
3	Roisin	Production Manager	PH-5	MCN, Content creator
4	Oisin	Independent	Independent	Content creator
5	Luke	Independent	Independent	Content creator
6	Barry	Independent	Independent	Content creator
7	Casey	Independent	Independent	Content creator