



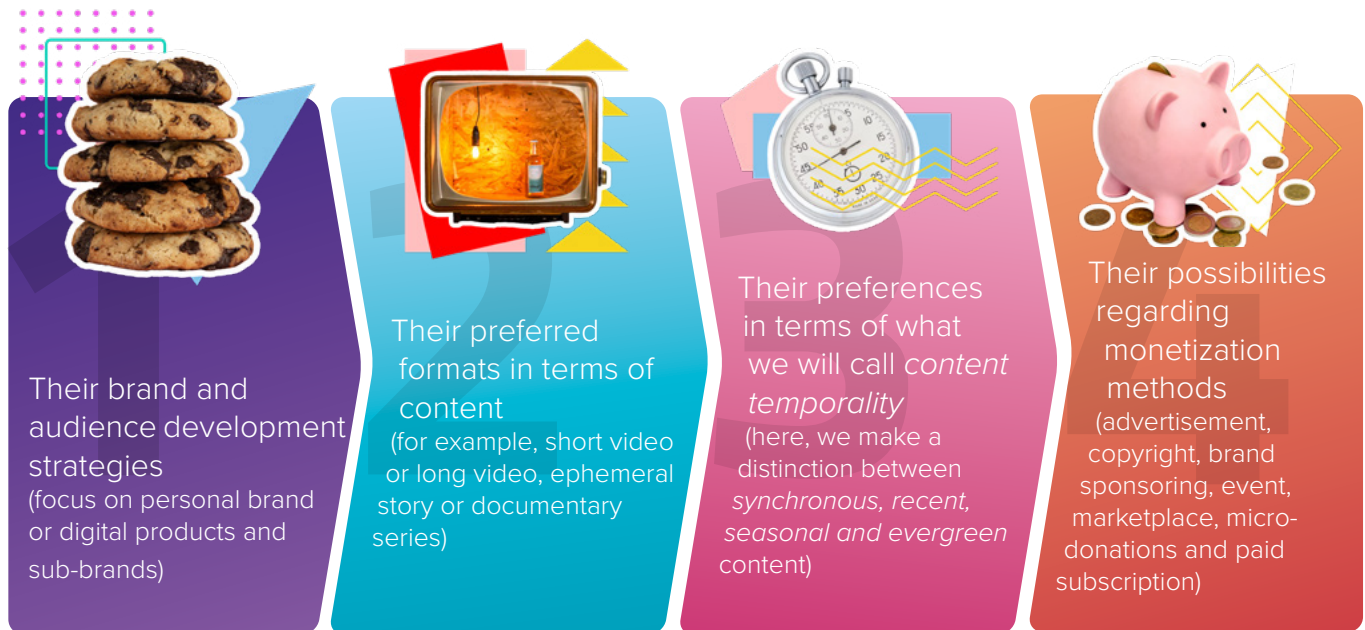
6. Content development modalities

1. Key factors to classify and model content development modalities

What is the relationship between platform governance and digital creators' preferences to create contents with certain formats and develop brands with certain strategic objectives, in particular, in Argentina?

CETyS | UdeSA (2023), Content platforms and creators in Argentina: analysis of the value chain and production and monetization modalities. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10908/23188>.

We propose an exploratory-descriptive modeling of what we will call *content channel development modalities*, a (quite limited) range of stylized options in terms of strategies for the production and monetization of content channels in streaming platforms that arise when we systemically consider four key factors:



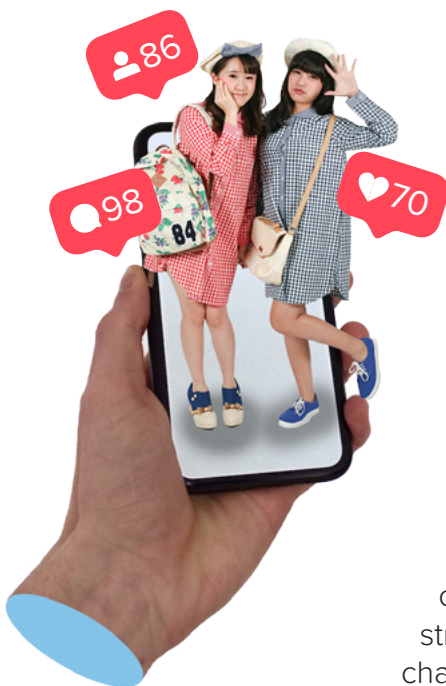
By “platform governance”, we propound an operationalization limited to some key aspects of their terms and conditions: the monetization methods (and only indirectly the inappropriate contents) and the authorized formats. Even though the order presented by a realistic outlook of platforms governance focuses on formats and monetization methods, the model proposed here focuses on creators. In that sense, the highest hierarchical factor in this scheme is that of brand and audience development strategies.

The next section has five parts, one for each factor, while the fifth one has an integrating purpose: the four factors are reviewed at the same time and a visual model that maps its interaction effects is put forward.

2. Brand and audience development strategies

The first key factor in the composition of these content development modalities are creators' **brand development strategies**.

Firstly, we distinguish two production modalities according to their ideal objective in terms of brand and audience development: focus on personality or focus on product.



Even though most creators initially focus on their personality, this study argues that two stylized strategies of contents development and digital business can be distinguished, one centered on the evolution of the personal brand and another one centered on the development of digital products; in each case, certain forms of monetization and certain distribution formats are more compatible institutionally. However, in both cases, the key is to build multiple channels with interactive audiences, and undergo a gradual and sustained process of professionalization of content creation. In particular, for the sources interviewed, it is about maximizing the knowledge of the rules of each platform (which they identify with their positioning algorithms and their terms and conditions to monetize and not to be demonetized).

In practice, creators are far from such binary practices. Their creations deploy overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, strategies (until they figure out some ways to optimize their channels), and they always offer a diverse and changing balance between the elements associated to their personal charisma and those more typical of a work with intellectual property. Often times, creators want to develop new IP and they put their faith in it, but, in the meantime, they keep an audience that is loyal to their personal figure. Moreover, the same creator turned multichannel agency may systematize that trend towards hybridization, seeking a diversification of digital products with a varying balance between charisma and product.

In the section devoted to value chain, we set out to describe creators according to their levels of strategic maturity and brand complexity. For example, creators of different verticals (#cooking and #truecrime) interviewed for this report pointed out that escalating and professionalizing their business model has led them to

go from a strategy centered on charisma and their own personality to trying to develop brand value and products with IP (intellectual property) value. They say that it offers greater business scalability, but it is also more sustainable as a productive model.

In this summary of production modalities, we propose to start off this same distinction, even if it is with a different sense. It is not about maturity stages with a diachronic outlook, but about alternative stylized strategies from a synchronous point of view. That is to say, two different strategic objectives which can be applied, in a given time, to an entrepreneurship based on content creation.

The role of serialization

Although we identify two opposing stylized strategies, we believe there is a hybrid strategy that is compatible with both objectives: *serialization*.

We propose the term *serialization* to describe a hybrid dynamic that is compatible with both extreme strategies, while it allows for the acquisition of traffic and followers participating in impersonal conversations without so much brand value. This is the bulk of Internet contents, those that can have an element of charisma and some potential as IP, but mainly they are inscribed in a series of contents that propose some performative standardization of content. For example, kitten videos or those of the #lifestyle vertical of the kind “my boyfriend does my make-up” or “how to make the perfect curling routine”, or tutorials of recipe videos to make the best *Vitel Tonne* for Christmas (which, we will see, is combined with a *seasonal* temporal modality).

Then, serialization allows us to inscribe the most random content in a conversation that systematizes it and enables both a fast viralization and a derived reproduction in the mid- term. While there is no original format but some talent, ingenuity or charisma in the execution of a formula already serialized, it comes close to personal self-promotion, but if it can start a series in itself, it can become a sort of IP (for example “astrological signs ordering coffee” by @FedeCirulnik, which is translated in on-site stand-up events).

By “series” we mean the existence of a set of unique pieces (of contents, whatever their format, but the more they agree with the format, the more serialized they will be in general). Contents are part of the same connecting thread as each piece of the series refers to the same slogan or proposition, which, in medium or long videos, is usually in the same title, but it is defined mainly by the tags assigned to the content by creators.



A creator may develop their own series or participate in series created by other creators that have become a trend.

The contents of a series may be viewed in any order, in principle, even though they may talk to one another and, therefore, assume some memory from the audience.

When many creators use the same background song for some content, they integrate a series of contents around that song. It is likely that whoever gives a like to one of those contents, will later see the rest of contents tagged similarly. This makes it possible to update and viralize videos uploaded some time ago, and unnoticed until then.

This way, creators can basically create content that exploits their personality (their personal charisma when reacting to circumstantial events or reproduce serialized formulas), content inscribed and indexed in a series with some viral trend, or content intensive in innovation that develops value as products with high design and with IP value.

In terms of production, it is about boosting the quality of producers, sustaining and increasing the volume of production, and learning to maximize the positioning algorithms, and to fulfill and circumvent the demonetization filters. In terms of positioning, it aims to enhance prestige and expand the audience of channels.

3. Content formats

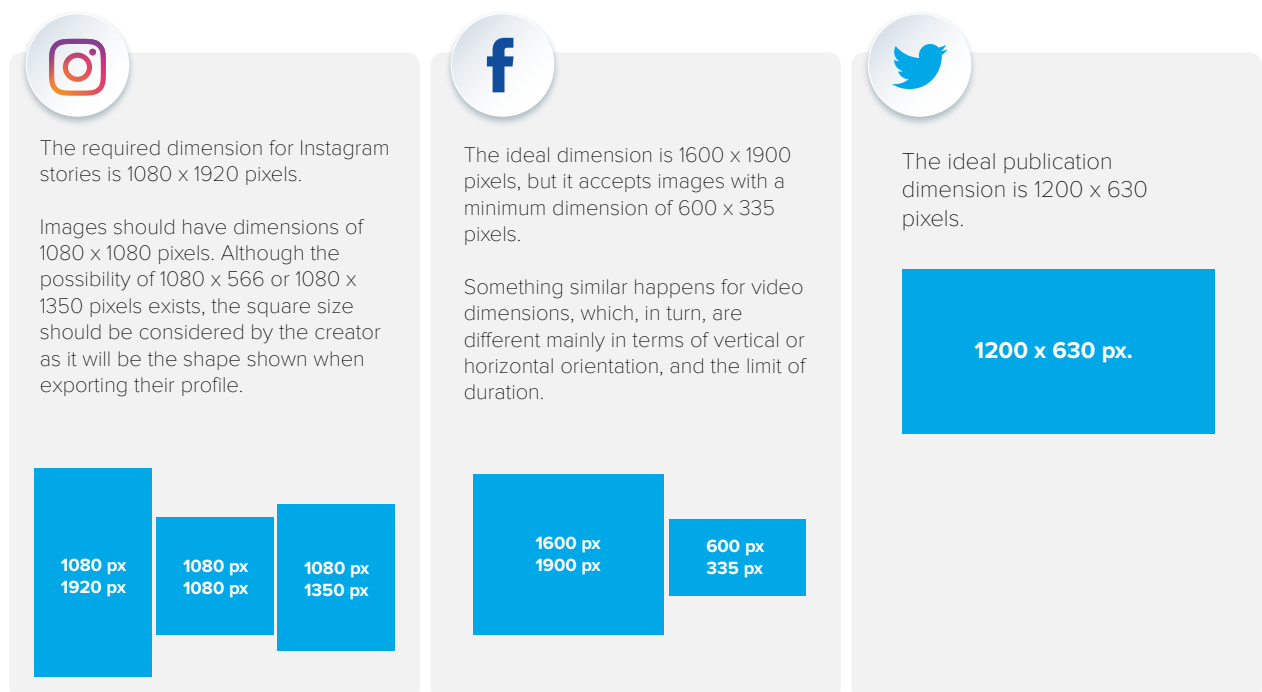
The second key factor are the technical **formats** defined, enabled and promoted by each platform, that is to say, the terms and conditions in which products can and should be exhibited and, therefore, the way they are designed.

For example, the size of a generic format like image posting changes according to the platform, as shown by Table 9.

Therefore, in order to use the same image in different platforms, creators should take into account that it should adapt to the ulterior cropping they will have to make, or else choose to make different pictures for each platform.

In the section about Platforms we pointed out what audiovisual or multimedia formats are enabled and promoted by the most prominent platforms.

Table 9. Image posting formats in selected platforms



Source: Own creation based on Hootsuite (2022)

Platforms and formats

Leadership in distribution channels of horizontal videos of medium and long duration allows *YouTube* to maximize the time available to sell ads. This, in turn, is coordinated with a complex system of incentives aiming to retain outstanding creators who are aligned with that general strategy. Instead, dynamism in formats such as ephemeral stories and photograph posts allows Instagram to maximize its role as a platform or market of multiple sides where brands co-sponsor contents with influential creators, and where entrepreneurial creators commercialize goods and services. The advertisement received by audiences starts off the knowledge about their likes and profile, but they are not necessarily linked to a creation, and so they do not imply direct monetization for creators.

Meanwhile, TikTok offers variants of the *short vertical video*. The ways algorithms of several of these short video platforms (among which we also find Kwai, oriented towards an even less professional segment) can recognize the virtues and possibilities of acceptance and promotion of some contents (and they act accordingly, sealing the fate of a content) is really significant.



Now then, in the music industry it is especially evident that the notion of “short vertical video” has in itself a multi-format that includes stylized variations, such as lip-sync, choreography, highlight (in events), vlog or clipping (in an interview or testimonial). These variations, such as the “challenge”, have already become formulas of popular knowledge, as were the video clip or live concert in the 80’s and 90’s. Thus, what we can see as hyper-specialization in a temporal format allows quite enough variability, both between and inside verticals, and, especially, a great capacity for the serialization of content. This, both in production processes and in consumption and reproduction, offers learning algorithms of the platform a dizzying pace of feedback of users’ preferences thanks to the discrete but irresistible charm of scrolling down to signal that we want to see something different.

For any vertical or industry in the digital creators' ecosystem, that minimalist grammar is functional, and for that we find endless contents that repeat and reinvent reduced formats of shocking video recipes, stand-up routines, tourism routes, fashion shows productions and make-up tutorials. This way, short vertical videos, especially in times of the pandemic, allowed *TikTok* to disrupt the content ecosystem. Argentina was no exception, even without offering creators any method of direct monetization. For this reason, since the emergence of *TikTok*, the competition to master the short vertical video market has been a key trend of the ecosystem, as indicated by the creation de reels in Instagram and of Shorts in *YouTube*.

This is linked to another vital aspect of the diverse interface of each platform. Audiences looking for medium or long videos very likely look for contents aligned with their preferences according to titles, key words or notifications of their favorite creators. Instead, in the short video format that burst in with *TikTok*, it is the algorithm that sets the order of results before users demand it. Thus, the key metric is displaced from the number of followers of a channel to the amount of time spent watching a video.

But besides being a platform where short vertical videos are created and distributed, *TikTok* has become one of the main tools of music distribution. To begin with, that is because this platform has its origin in *Musically*, an app whose competitive advantage was its agreements with record labels. Another reason is the fact that co-creative and serialized practices of contents development have appeared among creators. So combined, the features of *TikTok* videos and the popular use lead to adding background songs, either to repeat or imitate dancing and to use some background audio fragments for videos where certain situations take place. These formats have become adjacent contents of intensive works of intellectual property, which can be positioned and add value. Therefore, when a song is launched, it is important to think what "hook" that song may have in *TikTok*, and even create the dance to imitate. Given the reach of these videos, making a song popular in *TikTok* may have an impact on the position of that song in the music industry rankings. This is a remarkable element of the erosion of boundaries between the content ecosystem and the music industry, and it has contributed to position the latter at the core of the former.



Production modalities and formats

Each format somehow conditions its production modalities.

As has been said, in terms of success indicators for short videos, for example, algorithms motivate the pursuit of immediate impact and, to that end, semi-structured formats like lip-sync, choreographies and challenges are resorted to. Short videos are better produced in long sessions that make it possible to create multiple contents that will later be uploaded in a programmed way, even though regular sessions that draw on the most viral contents are required.

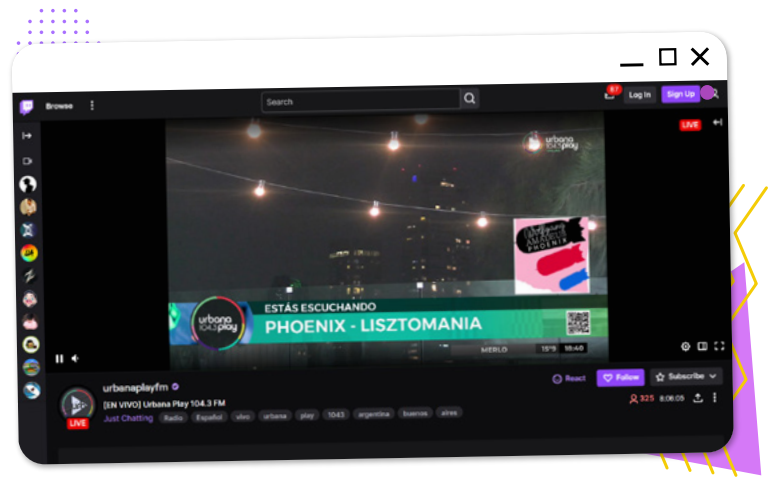
Production teams may be smaller. In general, they are one-person production units, but they usually have the assistance of relatives or friends, while they often resort to different forms of associativism with other creators. On many occasions we find a couple of creators (@rvbengarcia and @deliciousmartha, for example).

On the other hand, long videos require more production time between each product, so they promote the re-elaboration and serialization of materials, which leads to the attempt to find a potential IP or some distinctive product with brand value. They require building bigger production teams, but modular and non-exclusive (for example, scriptwriters may work for several creators).

Testimonials gathered from video creators show that they support small companies with three to five people, and they underscore the need to define roles that make it possible to serialize the production of this type of content: camera, script, edition and production (all of them roles that are usually shared with the main creator).



Anyway, production is just one part of the organization needed to become a professional creator, as many of them highlight the need to have data analytics, commercial management, a relationship with brands and even scheduling for the store to sale related products, and these roles do not depend so much on the preferred format as on the maturity of the entrepreneurship.



On the other hand, streaming formats require a level of permanent exposure to reach time quotas in a minimum line (even around eight hours per day).

Normally, we will say that the format motivates creators to focus on their personalities rather than on the creation of IPs, whose development remains a bit more focused on publishing companies and videogames firms. However, the need to maintain a productive pace that is physically very demanding, and then escalate the value proposal of the channel (or channels), may lead to at least two different dynamics:

▶ The co-creation between creators through collaboration, although there is no evidence that it will, in turn, translate into a dynamic that favors the co-management under regular production teams.

▶ The creation of IPs with radio brand value (such as @Luzutv).

In the next part, about content temporality, we will come back to the streaming format to underscore some noteworthy aspects.

4. Content temporality

In general, the temporal aspect of content creation is neglected. Yet the apparent immediacy associated to the disintermediation and dematerialization processes generated by the digital era (Baricco, 2019) includes nuisances and complexities worth looking into, especially the different production and reproduction speeds.

Thus, the third factor in this model is **content temporality**: specifically, the relationship between the production time and the reproduction time. The suggested distinction separates four ideal types of content, depending on the degree of temporal distance between both events: *synchronous*, *recent*, *seasonal* and *evergreen*.⁵

Synchronous content

The content of *synchronous temporality* is content of live broadcasting by means of different streaming formats. We distinguish two sub-types: synchronous with a focus on the personal brand, although we can use works with intellectual property to react to them, and where we usually resort to associativism (e.g., let's chat, live gameplay, vlog stream); and synchronous with a focus on the digital product, where the focus of the live broadcast is on the development of intangible assets with franchising potential (e.g., music festival or e-sport competition). In the first case, the main monetization strategy are contracts with platforms, subscriptions/micro-donations, personal events, and personal marketplaces. In the second case, the most compatible monetization methods are advertisement income and streaming broadcast of events.

Recent content

The *recent temporality* content is anchored in the present as a juncture, even without being synchronous, and is characterized by some immediacy in the production, which tries to create disruptive content which, rather than surviving the passing of time, will be attractive enough to become viral as soon as possible feeding on the latest trends.

5. In part, the matrix emerged as stylization of the contribution of testimonials from the sources interviewed, as in the case of the category *evergreen*, where a leading creator of the vertical #truecrime was openly inscribed.

In terms of compatible formats, it is short content, in general vertical, with a generally fast production and perhaps a bit improvised, and which tries to exploit the most serialized aspects of some formula that has already been successful for another creator (and repeated by new creators with some personal changes). Some similar formats are challenges, lip-sync and choreographies.



It includes much ephemeral content (like stories), but not all the recent content is ephemeral. However, TikTok has introduced new dynamics in this segment, because the recent content that does not get to be viral when uploaded can very well be so later, for different circumstantial reasons. On several occasions, creators manage to become known by only one piece of content that gets to be viral, but they had already produced and shared different material that then becomes a boom in traffic.

In general, the recent content is not searched deliberately by users but is “found” through algorithm training according to users’ own preferences.

The main monetization strategy are sponsored contents, subscriptions/micro-donations, personal events and personal marketplaces.

Seasonal content

The *seasonal temporality* content is not necessarily anchored to the present but does follow an annual calendar, activated during certain seasons, although it may be disabled the rest of time. It is one variant of the *evergreen temporality* content, but it triggers some critical mass at certain periods of time (some may even be repeated from time to time). It tries to be attractive despite the passing of time and be active again under some circumstances (seasons, festivities, championships, awards).

The main monetization strategy would be advertisement income and sales of goods. Some compatible formats are: some #unboxing, mainly #fashion (such as flagship fashion shows at season change), but also #technology (such as the launch of some products scheduled for specific dates, like Christmas, BlackFriday or

Children's Day), newsletters, content about relevant sports tournaments (like FIFA World Cup 2023 or local leagues) or the #eSports vertical (such as videogame tournaments like LOL, in order on the annual calendar), and season specials (like Christmas recipes, tourism contents on vacations or historical documentary videos about commemoration days), among others.



Evergreen content

In the case of *evergreen* content, its production is not necessarily anchored to the present, and it seeks to be attractive in spite of the passing of time. It is the most reflexive content, which can have better quality in terms of production.

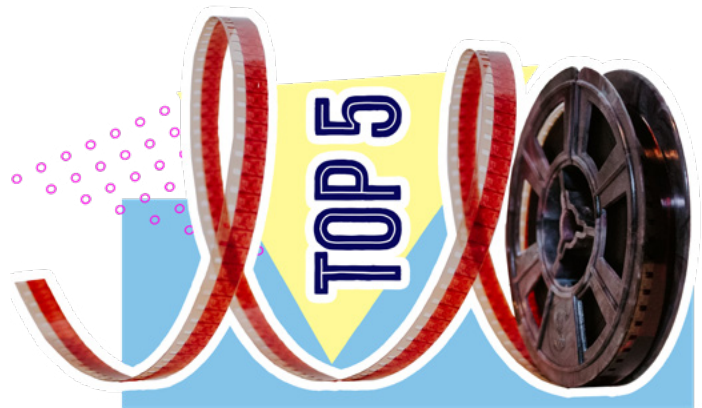
The title of this content is quite important because users usually look for some content and find the one that is the closest to their search, instead of being assisted by the visualization algorithms. In the recent content, as we have already said, that search is made by algorithms, not users, albeit based on automatic learning applied to the history of all the prior choices made by the user, and by all the users⁶.

The main monetization strategies would be the copyright and advertisement income, although supporting a growing channel may lead creators to get alternative revenue by means of alliances with brands or direct contracts with platforms.

The compatible formats are contents with longer duration or high added value based on some franchising potential in terms of intellectual property, from podcasts and video essays to music video clips.

6. One creator points out that one of her professional leaps took place in 2017, when she figured out the logic of algorithms associated to video tagging. With time and the evolution of the ecosystem, says a source of the accelerators environment, the use of key words has become less relevant than sustaining a regular production volume, according to certain positioning thresholds.

Anyway, not all evergreen contents have to create their own intellectual property value to be attractive. For example, tourism reviews, the preparation of some ranking (for example, in the movie and series industry), a historical documentary video or DIY tutorials, among others.



5. Monetization methods

The fourth factor is the **monetization methods**. Here we retrieve the distinction made throughout the report, whether it is direct or indirect monetization in the platform (through the platform).

If we talk about videos that are monetizable in a direct manner through advertisement, YouTube offers the most competitive environment. If we talk about ephemeral formats that allow an alliance with a brand from highly influential accounts, Instagram offers the best alternative. In TikTok there are fewer sponsored contents, but their alliances with record labels favor in particular the monetization of music artists and the positioning of entrepreneurs around the music ecosystem. If we talk about micro-donations or referred commercial associations, Twitch offers a format that is compatible with its maximization.

In order to use the monetization strategies available in the sector effectively, it is vital to have quite robust knowledge about what can be obtained from the contents specifically produced, what type of audiences they are aimed at, and what platforms make it possible to optimize a given type of content. Beside the different strategies followed by each one, remunerated creators are the ones who can create massive channels with interactive audiences, produce a sustained volumen of weekly material and maximize their knowledge about the algorithmic patterns of each platform, which implies learning both to be “viralized” and not to be “demonetized”. This idea entails being well aware of the terms and conditions of the platforms (which usually change), whether it is the thresholds form which they can have greater content circulation, or rules and practices of demonetization of content due to different filters.

The monthly amount received by each creator is defined by a number of variables that are platform-specific, and, in general, opaque for creators, who learn them by trial and error. The production volumen is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to remain relevant for algorithms. The so-called “viralization” does not guarantee revenue, but it helps to get high audience engagement indicators, a pre-condition to monetize, as contents are privileged by algorithms to show in a region or market segment when the production pace is sustained.



Possible monetization



YouTube

Videos that are monetizable directly through advertisement.



Instagram

Ephemeral formats that allow an alliance with a brand from highly influential accounts.



TikTok

Less sponsored content, but its alliances with music labels favor monetization of music artists and entrepreneurs around the music ecosystem.



Twitch

Micro-donations or referred commercial relationships.

A key question all creators ask sooner rather than later is how much material should be uploaded in a given period (in general, a week or a month) to keep the audience expansion flow stable. There are no standards, but by way of reference, it can be said that, in the case of medium to long videos, testimonials talk about four weekly videos of 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the vertical (for example, #cooking or #sports). Once the optimum volume and the right frequency to broadcast contents are identified, creators can reduce significantly the uncertainty about how much of it they will really monetize if they can deal with the demand of the production pace. This, in turn, allows them to gain more room for maneuver to plan the development of ideas with potential intellectual property.

In the production of short videos, the sources interviewed also agree that the key is to produce a stable but growing weekly volumen, with about five short videos per week as the stylized threshold to achieve better positioning. In these formats, TikTok e Instagram rule; in Argentina, they do not have direct monetization methods (except for the marketplace, in the case of Instagram) so, in these formats, remunerated creators are the ones who can deal with the accelerated production pace demand, while they know how to adapt to the greater uncertainty of how much of it they will really monetize at the end of each month.

On the other hand, the possibility that contents may be demonetized by different clauses regarding inappropriate content or restricted due to intellectual property, or that the terms and conditions may change without adding internal claim mechanisms, creates some conditions associated to a greater uncertainty and a bigger risk.

The risk of demonetization for infringement of terms and conditions differs depending on the long or intensive IP formats, although we cannot say that it is necessarily

smaller. This depends on the platform. In terms of intellectual property, risks in TikTok are lower than in YouTube, as the use of music not only is not a problem, but it is promoted. In terms of inappropriate content, however, the issue is not less sensitive than in other platforms, and, even when filters can take some days to remove content identified as infringer (which in short videos, with more viral interest, may be late), creators fear losing access to their accounts (that is to say, their channels). Yet this happens mainly on Instagram, where the value of each follower is higher than in video channels; on TikTok, the number of subscribers matters but not as much as the number of reproductions and the engagement, while in Youtube the key are the reproductions, but also increasingly more the paid followers, although feedback from audiences about the appropriate nature of contents is particularly relevant.

6. Integration of the four factors and their interaction effects

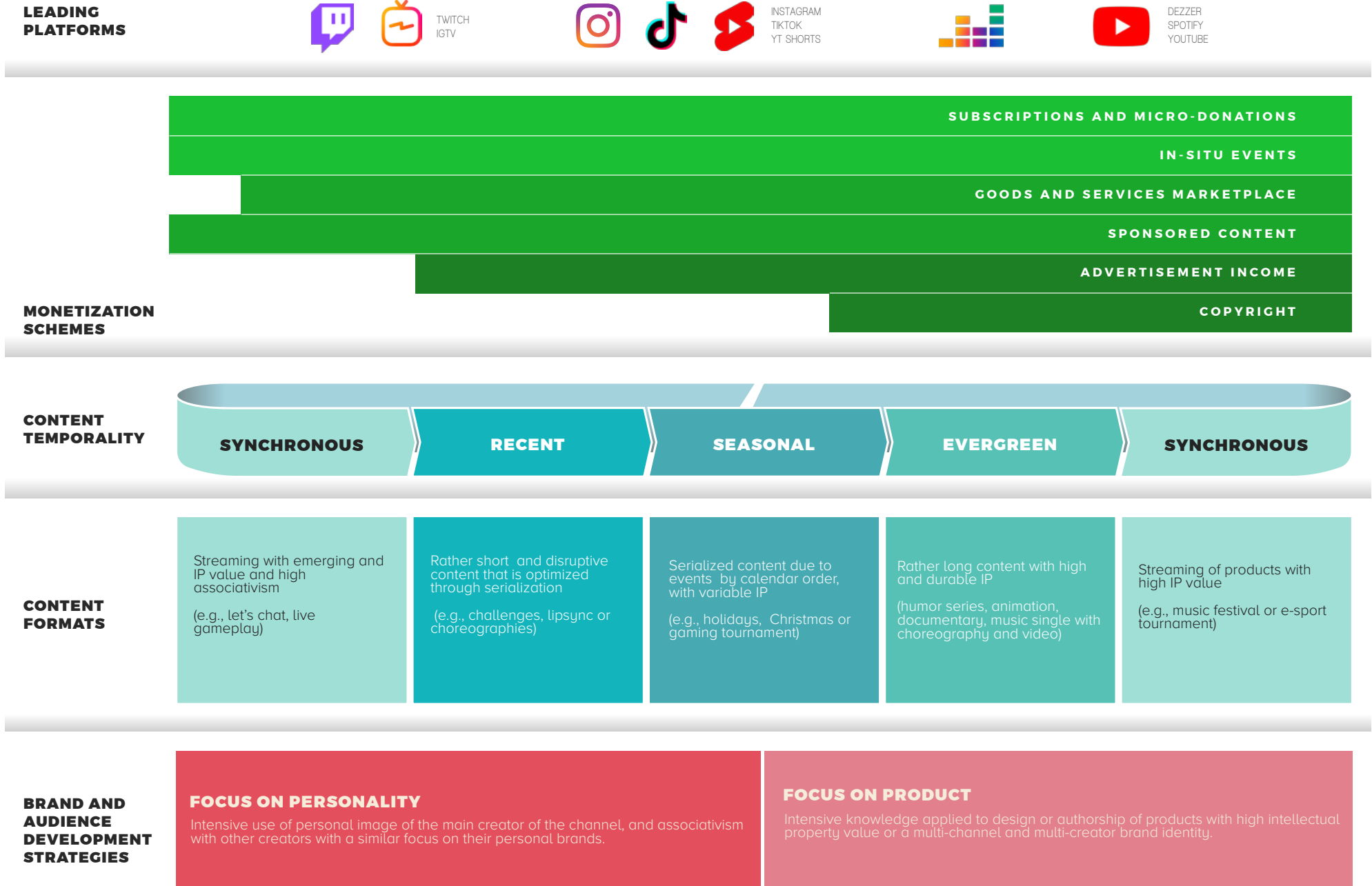
Even though the description of each factor introduced some references to links and interdependences, in this final section we will go over the four factors at the same time, and we will propose a visual model that maps their interaction effects.

Something interesting happens when the alignment between some factors is problematized, configuring paths of possibility more or less defined that offer some “agency” to creators in the face of the structural conditions set by platforms.

A basic assumption is that the two stylized ways to make up the value of the content (focusing on the creators’ personality or on the product as brand or as asset with intellectual property) help to put the other factors in order. This is absolutely meaningful as this report looks deeper into creators than into platforms, although we start off the recognition that platforms define the rules of the game.

Based on this idea, Graph 2 propounds a visual model that stylizes the interaction effects among factors as if they were stacked layers whose compatibility is expressed by means of a greater or lesser degree of alignment (from left to right) among the options available in each factor (or layer). It also maps the dominant platforms in each case.

Graph 2. Stylized model of content development modalities



Source: Own creation

As in a world map, we lose sight on the fact that extremes also meet. This image is better understood as a Moebius strip: whatever ends on one side starts on the other. A “music live session” format by Bizarrap is a *synchronous* content destined to be *evergreen*, as are some podcasts like @EIMetodoRebord. Other times, the IP may be less restricted to the channel (or channels) of a main creator, and develop value as a company with the complexity of a multi-channel network, such as @luzutv or @futurock. Here also, like escaping on the edges in the Pac-Man and appearing on the other side, we see evergreen contents coming out of synchronous strategies that can also focus on the “self-branding” of some charismatic creators.

The model is just a guide to better understand the shades, not an explanatory proposal or even a comprehensible descriptive guide. It is still an exploratory approach, and its development would require going deeper into the empirical analysis by means of a sample with some representativeness and a longitudinal analysis of creators’ profiles.

We find more hybridization in the monetization methods, as many of them are compatible with almost all the production strategies, but not all of them, or in the same way. IP intensive contents enable a copyright path rather limited to music creators, but the advertisement income, while they tend to prefer long videos as more durable, is found in almost all the chain. It is less common, but the IP development may lead to richer contents, such as films, TV series or theater plays. Actors such as La Granja de Zenón (a multichannel network) are better positioned to want to move forward in such schemes.

In terms of advertisement income, long contents are preferable for platforms such as YouTube because they have more time available to insert advertisement content. Even though there will

be possibilities to access the advertisement in other modalities, as in the *synchronous* one, it may be through direct advertisement rather than through platforms.

Alternatively, a strategy centered on the exploitation of image and personality, besides showing some affinity with the *synchronous* and *recent* temporalities, is likely to resort to indirect monetization methods such as sponsored contents or marketplaces, or through direct monetization methods such as micro-donations or events.

For these reasons, brand development modalities are related to preferred formats (and therefore, platforms). A strategy centered on IP development will probably be inclined to generate contents in formats that are attractive for platforms that better monetize that work with copyright: Spotify or TikTok for music, YouTube for video and podcast. Instead, a strategy centered on the maximization of the personal brand will probably be more inclined to generate contents in attractive formats (shorter and more ephemeral) for the platforms that create better marketplace conditions for the synergy with sponsoring brands, like Instagram, Twitch and TikTok.

