



8. Conclusions

This work is a first approach to a concept under development: “creative economy” or “economy of content creators”, through which creators, filmmakers, artists, streamers, influencers, online players, curators and many other independent actors connect with their audiences, engage them and get revenue through the internet environment. Nowadays, it is estimated that there are 50 million creators, and only 2 million of them can make a living out of it.

We seek to describe creators, understand their dynamics of interaction, modalities of production, drivers and barriers, demands and challenges in Argentina. This country is the third market in size in the region, with a relatively high Internet penetration (39,8 million people connected, 87,2% of the population), with 36 million social media users who spend, on average, 3 hours and 25 minutes per day on social media.

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>.

The plataformization of the digital political economy combines trends towards disintermediation, decentralization and concentration. Regarding the marginal costs of production, distribution and reproduction, platforms have made it possible to reduce some barriers of access to creation and have enabled new production and consumption models so artists and creators can connect with their audiences more easily. Creators share content in platforms sponsored by advertisement, associate with brands to make sponsored content and lean on aggregators, distributors and other service platforms to professionalize their creation. Their contents allow them to communicate with their audiences and engage them in a permanent conversation. Audiences, in turn, can help creators economically by committing with the content, paying it by means of micro-donations or subscriptions, or buying products or services of the brands they support or are associated with, or their personal brands or brands associated with their channels through their own marketplaces.

The content produced by creators (texts, podcasts, music, videos, digital books, games, live broadcasts and many of their own variants and novelties) is barely being typified and characterized at present. The components of the value chain are very dynamic and, sometimes, have blurry borders. Both in the roles and characteristics that typify actors and in content production modalities, we see trends that, when the time comes to describe them, show the novel and provisional element that distinguish this new livelihood for many digital creators.

Even more complex is to understand its operation in peripheral countries of the global South with a population that is relatively smaller compared to the big centers of production and consumption, whose advertisement market or the volume of audience is small or mid-sized. As we saw in the case of Argentina, creators in the developing world, and located in countries with a smaller relative size, probably do not have all the tools of monetization, development funds and incentives.

The data available are limited and, in most cases, estimated and projected based on polls. The state of the art in the world of academia is quite incipient as well, and it is usually more commercial in nature or, where there is more academic rigor, rather ethnographic. In part, we run the risk of generalizing particular experiences and trajectories to try to understand the complexity of how, today, digital creators can turn their activity into a livelihood, an industry and, ultimately, a sector that creates economic and social value for an economy.

Some common trends observed in this incipient creative economy on a general level may be:



Consistency, volumen and professionalism.

For creators, there are no possibilities to be seen and amplified by big audiences without some consistent presence in social media. A continuous production according to the parameters of each platform is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for algorithms to expose creators to be seen by more users.



Professionalization creates direct and indirect value, besides employment.

Creators who begin to be successful become entrepreneurship founders and create teams that assemble original conceptualizations and tools around their art. By growing in scale, the focus on personality is less sustainable, and true and sophisticated organizations are required, as well as other types of support from other actors (distributors, aggregators, teams, communities) to be more massive, become multi-channels and join gaming leagues or communities, to name some options.



Platforms are just a means to access and amplify their reach, but hardly sustainable as the only monetization method.

There are relatively few exclusive creators in a platform. Most of them are present in several, with varying degrees of success, although they tend to specialize in one and replicate content in the others. After some level of knowledge by the public, many seek to take their social media followers to their own web pages with marketplaces, and they develop related products (books, merchandising, paid presence or events) on their own or in agreement with brands, which allows them to escalate their income schemes and volume. This, which comes natural for the “analogue” creators who reached social networks when they were already famous, starts to be also vital for the most successful “digital” creators, who were born and became famous thanks to social media.



Limited interoperability, learning by doing, volatility and vulnerability of the business.

Creations and success mechanisms in one platform do not necessarily work in another. Most creators usually learn to understand the algorithmic operation of each one and the differences of terms and conditions, especially how demonetization filters work based on experience, trial and error. Changes in the terms and conditions may leave out of the market different creations or production modalities, and there is little to be done about it as long as freedom of expression is not infringed. The digital business is volatile and vulnerable. There are “coaches” and agents or guides, and even communities and other support platforms that give advice that are growing, but they are not massive yet.

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A few creators strongly attract audiences' attention and income, while the rest is part of the "long tail".

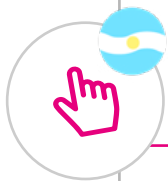
Different studies of the most successful creators show that a big part of them, about 1-2% of the most successful ones, often concentrate 90% of the audience and monetization. The rest, 98%, compete for 10% of the audience and an even smaller percentage of revenue. Platforms have made it easier to access monetization, expanding the "base of the pyramid", but they have not changed the dynamics offered by the cultural industries in general, sports, and other professions where there are huge income asymmetries between the most successful people and the rest.



Apart from the rules set by platforms, creators have some room for maneuver and capacity for action to socially own their creation.

We identify four factors that affect these paths for the development of channels and brands, creating a (quite limited) spectrum of stylized options in terms of strategies for the production and monetization of content channels in streaming platforms: a) their strategies for the development of brand and audience: focus on personal brand or on digital products and sub-brands; b) their preferred formats in terms of contents: for example, short video or long video, ephemeral story or documentary series; c) their preferences in terms of what we call content *temporality*, where we make a distinction between *synchronous, recent, seasonal and evergreen content*; and d) their possibilities in terms of monetization schemes: advertisement, copyright, brand sponsoring, event, marketplace, micro-donations and paid subscription, among others.

Some special characteristics of the Argentine market that we may highlight outside these general trends are:



The “click value” is relatively smaller (and it is depreciated).

The Argentine market has adverse structural conditions compared to more massive markets in the Ibero-American region, such as the Mexican, Brazilian or Spanish ones. The limited size of the national advertisement market and the value of subscriptions to platforms in the local currency, constantly depreciated, may be discouraging when a creator tries to translate their reproductions, views and advertisement. This can create asymmetries and distortions for the development of the local market and ecosystem.



High level of cultural innovation and regional leadership that invites to cross borders.

Formats, styles, personalities, music movements, producers and concepts emerge from the country, and they cross borders and set trends in the region. As a consequence of the situation described before, these leading actors with a potential for scale and massiveness will see, sooner than later, that this prominence leads to better relative remuneration, as it allows them to cross some reproduction and engagement thresholds from which not only do their audiences become regional and international, but they gain access to other values in terms of *click value*.



Fewer platform monetization and investment options available.

The medium-sized audience market, its lower income available for subscriptions measured in international currency and the smaller advertisement market reduces incentives for platforms to completely deploy their entire offer in the country. As a consequence, the possibilities for incubation, access and promotion of new creators are affected. This lack of availability has also propelled related digital services, for example, micro-donations, to make up for this missing offer.



Dependence, diversification and bargaining power.

Creators are fully aware of their dependence on the platforms in general and some platforms in particular. Now then, that dependence is not questioned so much by the most successful creators but accepted as the rule of the game and, in some way, socially re-owned, which leads them to specialize in the platforms where they obtain their main monetization scheme. That is to say, creators seem to respond through a strategy of *specialization* in the platforms that their biggest sources of income depend on (which have some socio-technical formats and some algorithmic policies), rather than pivoting strategies among platforms, and even less migrating, although they try to diversify the sources of monetization by adding sponsored contents, sponsored events and the commercialization of goods and services in their own marketplaces. That is to say, reducing their economic dependence, and not so much their infrastructural dependence in terms of channel development.

