



The Rise Of Micro-Celebrities: A Bottom-Up Approach On Social Media

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Abstract: Popularity has become more accessible in the digital age; wherein ordinary people can also become celebrities without necessarily needing the traditional gatekeepers in mainstream media. Micro celebrity culture is the phenomenon that has shifted the way we perceive and interact with celebrities. Thereby, in contradiction to well-acknowledged celebrities, micro celebrities build their reputation through a gradual process of social media development and sharing of their specialized contents.

The article will interpret the case studies of specific micro-celebrities based on the social capital theory on considering their audience-building practice through trust, engagement, and their social relationships that bring completion to their reputation. It will be pursued by three of the most significant methodologies-based content analysis, follower engagement metrics.

This article spells out the structure of such an approach from a bottom-up perspective when critically looking into audience-building practices by micro-celebrities, socio-cultural origins of popularity, and wider implications regarding a changing media landscape and broader societal components.

Index Terms – Micro celebrity, social media, bottom up, social capital theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has immensely reduced the barriers to fame. Indeed, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have given fertile ground for the new age of celebrity, the micro-celebrity. These individuals often start with small, niche audiences but may eventually build up their fame to give stiff competition to the mainstream celebrities. Unlike traditional fame, which is often a top-down process channeled through media conglomerates like television, cinema etc., micro-celebrity culture is grassroots in its construction through more direct personal relationships with fans.

The concept of the micro-celebrity was first advanced by Theresa Senft in her groundbreaking work “Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks” in 2008, where she traced how individuals used webcams and early social networks to engage with fame. Since then, the term has followed a variety of lineages, and is used today to refer to the huge number of digital influencers who have created and maintained their public personas via Instagram, YouTube.

This article traces the drivers for the rise of micro-celebrities, the place of authenticity and niche contents within successful micro-celebrity practice, and the wider cultural and economic implications of the phenomenon.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Authenticity and reliability:

According to Alice Marwick (2015), in micro-celebrity culture, that which is most valued is perceived authenticity. Micro-celebrities are treasured, with regards to their perceived genuineness and the glimpse provided into their personal life, as compared to the traditional celebrity who comes across as a little distant and unreachable. This is very vital in building a network of fans and retaining them.

Jin & Phua, (2014) argue that the number of followers is the factor that is inextricably coupled with one's level of perceived social influence; therefore, the more followers a user has, the more influential they are perceived to be on social media. Moreover, the success of social media advertising greatly depends on consumer's attitude regarding such sponsorships, which has been clearly expressed - "One must be genuinely interested in the lives of celebrities for sponsorships to be influential" (Chen et al., 2011). Moreover, Wilcox (2011) in his study has found that many imitate their favorite celebrities, copying their styles in hopes of receiving just as many likes on their social media sites.

Economics of Influencer Marketing:

The reason being that consumers like to network with people who have interests and desires like their own, online communities provide them a platform for free and frank communications and help reinforce confidence. They influence this need by forming communities of similar-minded people. These can be based on goals and ideals as per Mangold & Faulds, 2009. Social media consumers can be influenced through this media because the users using this media tend to have similar interests.

Crystal Abidin (2016) explored how microcelebrities monetize influence through partnerships with brands in the service of "visibility labor" maintaining their public personas and appealing to advertisers. This economic model certainly diverges from traditional celebrity endorsements, heavily relying on the perceived authenticity of the microcelebrity and her direct engagement with her followers.

Social Impact and Identity Formation:

Microcelebrities are said to have gained their fame through social media, becoming therefore ever more important in studies on identity formation and social impact.

Marwick, A. E. (2015) deals with social media influencers in the creation of identity, specifically on Instagram. According to her, influencers shape identities through performative and aesthetic labor. These processes then influence followers' understandings of self-worth, beauty ideals, and authenticity.

Khamis, Ang, and Welling (2017) analyzed the social influence of micro-celebrities regarding their use within identity formation and consumer behavior. The researchers made a case for the conspicuous role that microcelebrities play in setting trends, especially self-perception, among their followers, particularly those from the more sensitive younger demographics.

III. THE BOTTUM-UP APPROACH

The rise of micro-celebrities is embedded in the bottom-up approach, which contrasts with the traditional top-down model of fame. The key elements are categorized by:

1. Building from the Ground Up: Often, the micro-celebrities are on minimal resources with no institutional support. They must depend upon self-personal charisma, creativity, and regular content creation to gain followers. This organic grassroots way of community building may have effects on audience engagement and loyalty.

2. Niche Content and Targeted Audiences: The characteristics of micro-celebrities depend on the niche content they often create. Instead of appealing to the mass audience, micro-celebrities focus on very specific interests or communities-be they vegan cookery, fitness, gaming, or fashion. This allows for niche audiences of people who are truly interested in the content they create.

3. Authenticity as Currency: In the world of micro-celebrity, authenticity often proves to be more valuable than polished production. The followers are into them because they think of micro-celebrities as "real" people, unlike the usual fake and unreachable celebrity images. It is all carefully contrived: micro-celebrities tend to share personal stories, struggles, and victories in a way that creates proximity and likeness.

4. Engagement and Community Building: Unlike traditional celebrities, micro-celebrities engage more with their audience directly. These are usually done by responding to comments, hosting live Q&A sessions, or even direct messaging. This level of interaction helps to stimulate a sense of community and belonging among followers, who feel a personal connection to the micro-celebrity.

5. Cross-Promotion and Collaborations:

Yet another popular way micro-celebrities expand their base is through collaborations with other influencers or brands. These collaborations often seem organic and symbiotic, where micro-celebrities build new audiences while, in turn, giving a seal of credibility to the brands they endorse.

IV. SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY – THE RISE IN BOTTOM-UP APPROACH OF MICRO CELEBRITIES

The rise of digital media has transformed the celebrity landscape and built a new generation of "micro-celebrities" using the social media platforms to cultivate personal brands and accumulate social capital. Such a phenomenon marks the shift from the top-down model of old celebrity regimes, where control was mainly held in the hands of mainstream media gatekeepers for the control of fame.

Social capital theory can be seen as an optimistic lens through which one might understand micro-celebrity culture, largely because of contributions made by scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam. It can be defined as the network of relationships and resources that individuals can draw upon and mobilize to achieve what they want. Social capital translates, in the life of a micro-celebrity, into social media, through which he or she can construct and maintain a faithful following, which is then transposed into different forms of economic and cultural capital (Mavroudis, 2018).

The bottom-up model of micro-celebrity culture also subverts the old power structures in the entertainment business. Today, any individual could create a personal brand and garner a huge following outside of major companies or of the major media institutions that back them. As Mavroudis observes, micro-celebrities "are engaged in varieties of fame that recast how visibility and self-branding work operate, with consequences that reach out well beyond the microcelebrity phenomenon."

This staged authenticity and managed connectedness of social media celebrity, according to researchers, provides an example of how micro-celebrities strategically use their digital presence to garner social capital.

V. CASE STUDIES

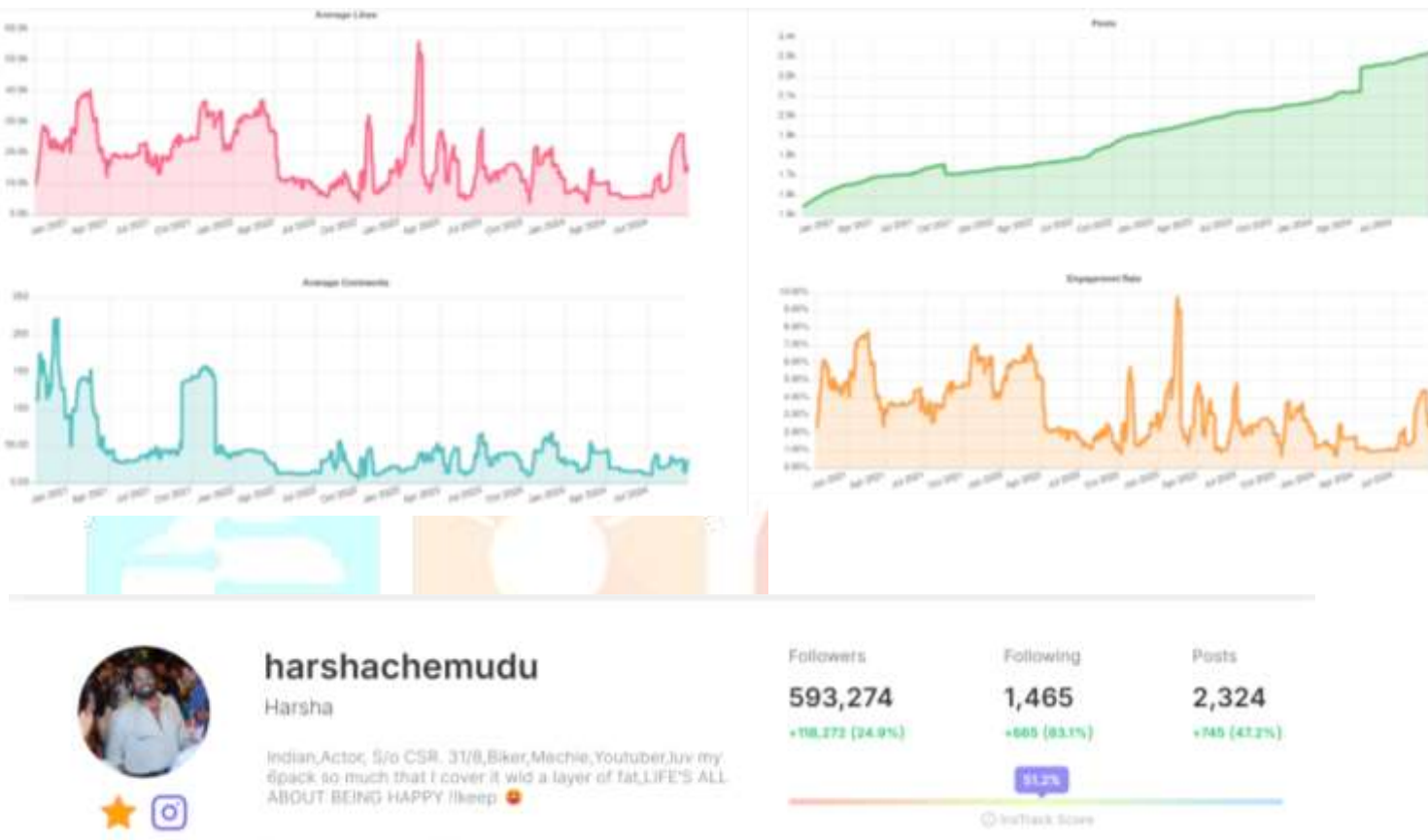
Better sense can be made of the bottom-up approach of micro-celebrities through scrutiny of few Indian online micro-celebrities who started on social media and then captured the mainstream media.

1. Viva Harsha (Telugu)

Harsha's "Viva" video, that was done as a part of the college assignment, gained enormous popularity among the viewers, particularly in the Telugu-speaking segment on social media. The theory of Social Capital could be employed to bring out the reason for such quick success through forming micro-celebrity from the bottom-up approach (Mohamad & Hassim, 2019). The factors that made Harsha popular were the ability to reach his audience at an interpersonal level and show them, the trials that they must deal with. That helped him build a connection network and thus became very popular. Harsha's content connects people on the cultural level and has helped him to create a devoted audience of people who connect with his humor and insights.

Adding local and cultural tastes to the theme, Harsha develops a close relationship with his local viewers and pushes it a notch higher with his fan interaction. Viva Harsha's YouTube channel has millions of views, and his popularity in the region ensures on-going interaction, as fans regularly share his videos on several social media. "Viva" among other successful projects provided a foundation for Harsha's ventures into mainstream Telugu cinema such as "Bhale Bhale Magadivoy" and "Krishna and His Leela."

The case of social media, particularly Facebook and Instagram, is projected as a technology assistant to the creation of micro-celebrities. This platform provided creators the ability to spread content far and beyond, including access to directly address audiences, which helped creators such as Harsha, build a specific personal brand and make more personal connections with their fans. For example, the reputation of Harsha Chemudu through "Viva" sketch and the consequent relationships with the traditional paths of fame are signs of social media revolution in the field. Berryman, Abidin, and Leaver note that the cross-medium transfer of virtual celebrities, which today is transmitted from online forums to the mainstream media sector, represents a trend that progressively common today (Berryman et al., 2021).



Instagram Metrics of Harsha Chemudu from 2020, November till September 2024

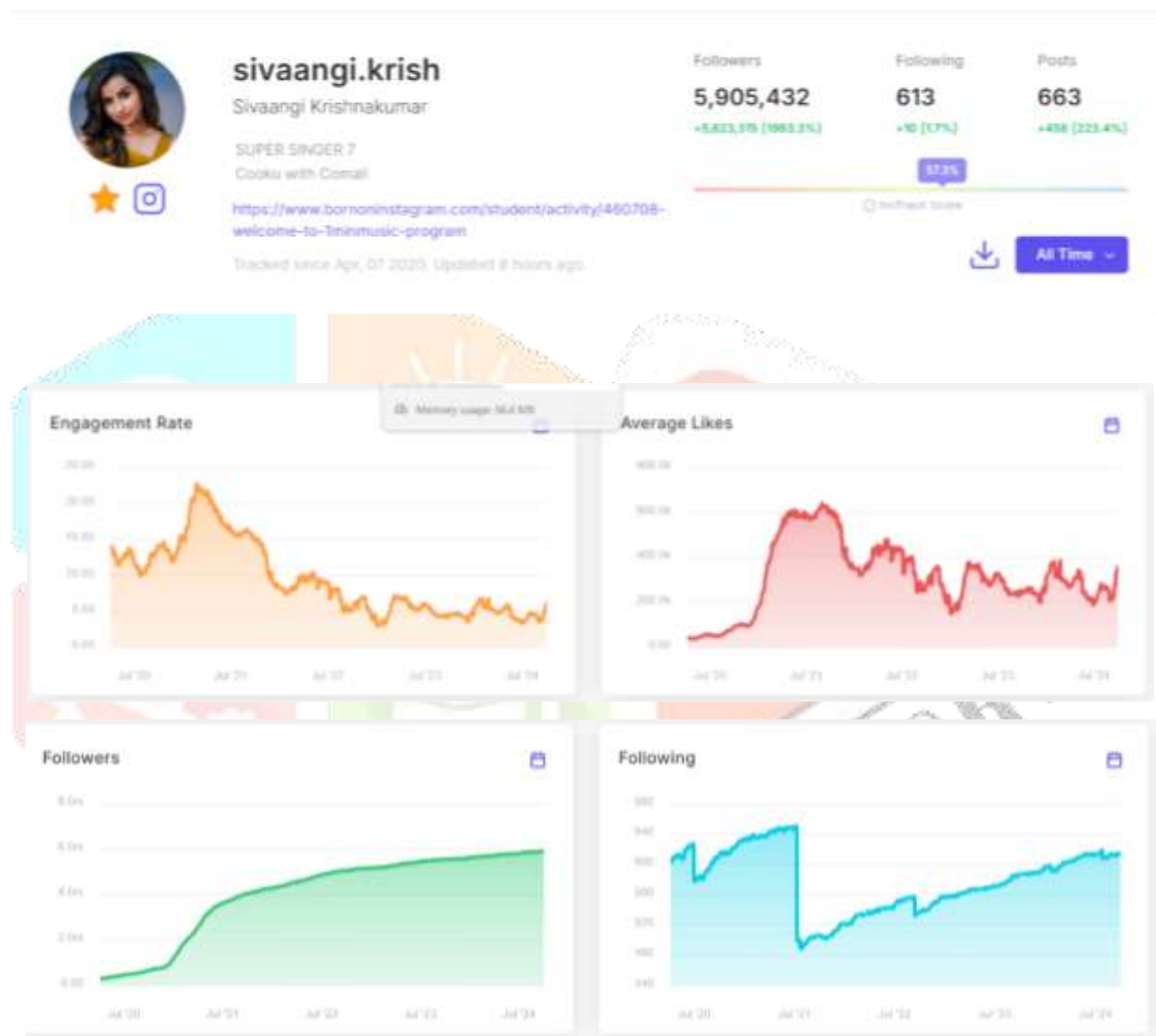
2. Sivaangi Krishnakumar:

Social media stands out as a means of access to greater success, such as that achieved by Sivaangi Krishnakumar. She started from doing cover versions as a small musician on YouTube and Instagram to being a recognized face in Tamil cinema, with the combination of digital and traditional media giving birth to a specific type of star persona (Mohamad & Hassim, 2019). People rely on social ties and networks to create accumulation of resources and opportunities according to social capital theory (Mitra, 2020). For Sivaangi Krishnakumar, the initial success she managed to gain from the transitions through social media transformed into creating a healthy network of followers and supporters. It was from this periodic content creation that an identity was fashioned and thus instituted strong credibility with her audience to make them ardent supporters of her talent and success. The rapport and engagement from the online community became the steppingstone from a micro-celebrity to a mainstream celebrity as her online presence and fan base became an asset in the traditional media landscape.

Sivaangi's public finds her talent believable and has entertained her within the realms of mass as well as celebrity arenas. Allowing her to gain a strong reputation in both media platforms-mainstream and niche celebrity spheres.

Leveraging television fame to establish an engaging social web: Sivaangi can develop an engaging social web by leveraging her popularity that has been garnered from her television career. Her true persona coupled with consistent creation of content ensures perpetual viewership.

Film, television, and digital media synergies have transformed the Bollywood celebrities from film icons into transmedia celebrity (Mitra, 2020). Similarly, Krishnakumar's transition shows how social media blurs the functions of micro-celebrities and mainstream stardom. In this context of shift in Indian mediascape, the Indian mediascape is still coming in terms with the rise of the social media micro-celebrity like Sivaangi Krishnakumar: authenticity, audience engagement, and the ability to powerfully use the digital platform are critical success factors toward earning wider recognition and success.



Instagram metrics Of Sivaangi Krishnakumar
from July, 2020 till September, 2024

3. Madras central / Put Chutney Team:

Put Chutney's success proves that there is expanding awareness of local digital content and that social media has indeed democratized the access to fame. The social capital of the group has been strong enough to take an online popularity band to the traditional screen space from the digital world.

The crucial factor behind the success of Put Chutney is strategic management of social media so as to cultivate a die-hard following. YouTube and Twitter helped the group reach out to its audience, create a strong brand identity, and become micro-celebrities within the Tamil digital landscape. This bottom-up approach to building a fan base and recognition is evidence of the democratizing power of social media that broke the traditional gates of the entertainment industry.

The case of Put Chutney is very important in the context of South India where content creators who can tap into the local sensibilities and earthy humor can gain a following of millions and thereafter transition into

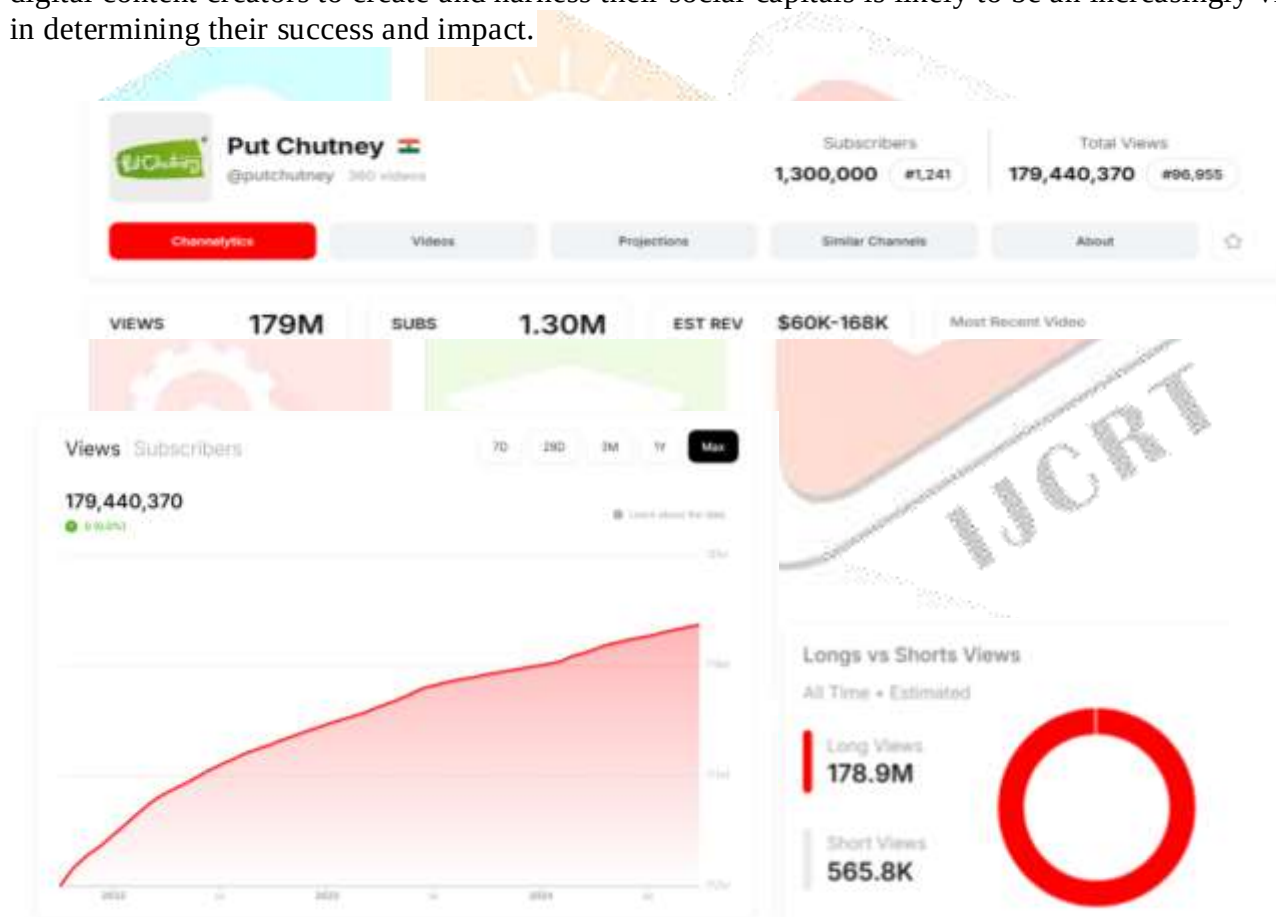
mainstream success. (Pande, 2018) The popularity of the group is due to their appeal in reaching out to the audience at a relatable level, couple with strategic use of social media, which has enabled them to gain a different niche in the Tamil entertainment industry.

Their content is directly linked to local culture, which makes them very relatable with their target audience. The channel extends social capital through shared cultural knowledge, bringing humor and relatable social commentary that helps in creating a strong sense of community among viewers. Through understanding the local audience and engaging with the trending topics of Tamil Nadu, Madras Central has developed an active fan base interacting with their content in both comments and shares. The videos they post daily garner millions of views and shares, thus turning out to be highly engaging among the Tamil-speaking crowd.

Once Put Chutney picked up momentum, the mainstream faces in the show put social media to their benefit and entered mainstream entertainment. Vignesh kanth, for instance, one of the faces of put chutney, features in Meesaya Murukku, the 2017 Tamil film-to prove that if the digital platform serves them well, they can get it to work for them in traditional screen space.

Indeed, transformation of Put Chutney from a digital comedy group into an established actor and entertainer in Tamil cinema, one can understand with the help of social capital theory. Social capital is defined as resources and networks accessible and leveraged by individuals or groups to realize their aims. For Put Chutney, strong social capital embedded in the group has formed the most crucial factor through having an online following and engagement in getting them to mainstream success.

The journey of a group represents the rising importance of social media in entertainment landscape and the power of micro-celebrities. As mass-media and entertainment industries continue to morph, the ability of digital content creators to create and harness their social capitals is likely to be an increasingly vital factor in determining their success and impact.



Put Chutney YouTube Metrics from February, 2015 to September, 2024

VI. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

While the bottom-up approach creates great opportunities for micro-celebrities, these are also marked by challenges. Unlike traditional celebrities, who have the luxury of relying on a team of professionals to manage their public image, micro-celebrities are often responsible for all aspects of their content creation and interaction with their audience.

1. Sustainability:

The pressure of having to put up new content all the time can easily lead to burnout. Unlike traditional celebrities, who have teams to manage their star images, micro-celebrities often manage most of the content creation and interactions themselves. This can become highly exhausting and is not easy to maintain over a long period of time.

2. Algorithmic Dependence:

Social media platforms regularly update their algorithms, and often, these updates affect the way information is propagated and consumed by followers. Micro-celebrities tend to be at the mercy of such algorithms. Changes to them sometimes lead to a total drop in visibility and engagement.

3. Monetization and Commercialization:

The greater the number of followers a micro-celebrity has, the more they struggle with a major challenge: how to balance authenticity with monetization. While brand partnerships and sponsored content bring in a lot of money, these also create accusations of "selling out" and alienate followers who valued the micro-celebrity's perceived authenticity.

4. Digital and Mental Health Risks:

Being always-on of social media can have some negative effects on the mental health of microcelebrities. Finally, constant public exposure, with constant criticism and a burden upon themselves to continue looking the way they do, indeed creates that moment in time when stress, anxiety, and burnout occur.

VII. IMPACT ON THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The emergence of micro-celebrities has brought a sea change to the media landscape in that:

1. Democratization of Fame:

The aspect of fame has been democratized using social media platforms, and thus anyone with a smartphone and access to the internet can hope to be a celebrity. Such a shift in power allows people to take matters into their hands and create their brand without the support of traditional gatekeepers.

2. Shift in Marketing and Advertising:

Brands are hiring micro-celebrities for campaigns of influencer marketing, recognizing that this new class of celebrity can reach a niche audience with more veracity and interest than traditional advertising does. This has caused a real paradigm shift in the way companies market their products, focusing less on A-list celebrities and instead on micro-influencers.

3. Cultural Shifts:

Micro-celebrities bear significant importance when it comes to shaping cultural manifestations and tendencies. They use their lived experiences, values, and lifestyles as tools in molding the ways their followers think, behave, and understand the world. It extends to everything, from consumer behavior to political participation.

4. Economic Consequences:

Another important impact of the rise of micro-celebrities relates to economic effects. By monetizing their influence through brand deals, merchandise sales, and other sources of income, they spur a certain kind of growth in the creator economy. The latter has consequently provided new avenues for entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, especially among the youths.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The rise of micro-celebrities on social media is a new paradigm in the ways people build their names and influence in this digital era. With their targets turning toward authenticity, specialized content, and direct engagement, micro-celebrities have been able to build strong, very loyal followings that even surpass those of traditional celebrities. The emergence of micro-celebrities such as Harsha Chemudu, Sivaangi Krishnakumar & Put chutney, points to a change in the celebrity culture in a way social media equipped them in with the opportunity of whole bottom approach bringing the prominent a scene people that connect with their fan base more effectively.

This approach simultaneously and profoundly offers several challenges that are to be addressed with care. Beyond the media landscape, which is always changing, an understanding of micro-celebrity culture dynamics stands at the heart of any well-functioning career in digital influence.

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