Investigating Microcelebrity Practices on YouTube in Pakistan: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Since its beginnings, YouTube has transformed from a video-sharing service to a platform where regular individuals may become popular through microcelebrity practices, like conventional media superstars.

Aims and methods: This study seeks to investigate contemporary microcelebrity behaviours on YouTube by using in-depth interviews with microcelebrities on YouTube around Pakistan.
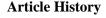
Results: Major findings revealed that YouTube is becoming more popular in Pakistan as more individuals access smartphones and high-speed internet. With no membership fees, more flexibility and room for creation, and the possibility of living a luxurious life and making money, YouTube is attracting more microcelebrities. These microcelebrities emphasized controversial activities such as false fights, copy-pasting material, obscenity, harsh language, and Clickbait as core practices. Key growth factors on YouTube in Pakistan include local language, relevance, consistency, and female producers. Microcelebrities create an authentic image online to be liked, adored, and validated. Regarding popularity, attention, and fan base management, data show that microcelebrities frequently employ viral techniques, appealing thumbnails, and freebies. Creating content on relevant, taboo, controversial themes and using family members as commodities is standard practice to show intimacy.

Conclusion: Thus, it concluded that microcelebrities earn considerable influence and popularity and achieve celebrity status. Since many (micro)celebrities emerged on YouTube worldwide, it is also a prevalent phenomenon in Pakistan.

Keywords: Microcelebrities, Content Creators, YouTubers, Fame and Attention, Microcelebrity Model.

Introduction

With over 2 billion active users on YouTube globally, it has attracted ordinary individuals to join this platform and become a celebrity (Bessi et al., 2016). Burke et al., (2009) argued that due to the bottom-up processes of the social networking site, primarily YouTube, Vloggers, content creators, or users on this site could be constructed as celebrities. This is defined as "the performance of celebrity has become part

of daily practice of millions of consumers" (Djafarova, n.d.). Microcelebrity in the social media age has been defined as a set of techniques and practices performed by anyone with a smartphone, laptop, or camera (Feller & Burroughs, 2022). Thus, the concept of microcelebrity has broadened in the present social media age. The desire for attention, validation, fame and considerable standing or influence of an individual among people has a long history. Many media scholars and researchers have identified that celebrity and fame have concurred for centuries (Wattenhofer et al., 2021). The advent of new media has given rise to new forms of celebrities known as (micro)celebrities (Jackman, 2019). Various types of research have been done to understand these (micro)celebrities, which focused on self-performance, follower engagement, and authenticity, as well as ordinary individuals as promotional apparatus for brands (Laaksonen et al., 2020).

Consequently, with the innovation of advanced technology and the web, particularly social media sites, a shift has been observed from broadcast to participatory media in this century. This shift has enabled ordinary citizens to attain fame and success and achieve celebrity status through microcelebrity practices (Bessi et al., 2016). These changes are increasingly changing the concept of celebrity around the world. Numerous studies have addressed the concept of "microcelebrity", i.e., self-performance, follower-engagement, advertorial discourse, authenticity, and ordinary individuals as promotional apparatus for brands (Klobas et al., 2018). These studies explicitly indicate that microcelebrity is rapidly evolving and being adopted by social media users across the globe. Particularly, in Pakistan, around 650+ channels have been made on YouTube by users producing and uploading an enormous amount of content online, encouraging others to join this platform (M. Y. Ali et al., 2019). Notably, YouTube in Pakistan has surfaced the ground of popularity after the lifting of 3 years ban and introducing a monetization feature on this video streaming platform (Nawaz et al., 2019). Many ordinary people on YouTube in Pakistan who are not associated with mainstream media are still social media sensations with a huge following or thousands of subscribers. These individuals include Irfan Junejo, Anusha Khan, Nisho Khan, Khadeja, Humna Raza, Muzammil Zaidi, Momina Munir and many others identified as prominent (micro)celebrities of Pakistan (Iftikhar et al., 2020).

Aim of the Study

The focus of this study is to take insights into the practices of (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan. The present is partially digital, but the future will be digital only. A paradigm shift will be observed in the recent future whereby changing the very definition of everything from traditional means of communication to access to entertainment to attaining celebrity status. This research aims to explore the current practices of (micro)celebrities from their perspectives and to understand how the (micro)celebrity practices have enabled ordinary citizens to gain celebrity status online in a Pakistani setting. The answer to this question would be explained from the approaches and practices that (micro)celebrities incorporate in their videos.

RQ1: What are the current practices among micro celebrities in Pakistan?

RQ2: How do these celebrities avail celebrity status online?

Review of Literature

YouTube in Pakistan

The popularity and consumption of the video streaming platform YouTube are inscrutable in the South Asian region, particularly in Pakistan (Afandi et al., 2022). Since the introduction of YouTube Pulse in Pakistan in January 2019, targeted at hundreds of advertisers, marketers, content producers, and agency associates to educate and make aware them how to monetize their videos, market their creativity and become successful through this platform has greatly echoed the popularity and utilization of this platform (Rani et al., 2021). Earlier in this event, many e-services, including YouTube, were reluctant to invest their energy and time in Pakistan. One major reason was the ban on online streaming sites in Pakistan for 3 years. However, as soon as the ban was lifted and with the launch of the 4G service in Pakistan, many

online services turned their heads to once-neglected countries. In 2016, when the restriction to engage with the YouTube website was lifted in Pakistan, only 8 of Pakistan's YouTube channels had over a hundred thousand subscribers. However, within 2 years, over 650 YouTube creatives enjoy this subscription count (Iftikhar et al., 2020).

YouTube during the TV's prime time hours, that is, between 8-11 PM (Usher, 2020). The disclosure of this result indicates how the consumption patterns of the people of Pakistan have greatly shifted from conventional media to participatory media. These prominent figures attracted the attention of marketers to shift their advertising patterns and users who found a significant employment opportunities from this platform. Earning and changing livelihood is a major reason why ordinary individuals join this platform. One such inspirational case of a Pakistani YouTuber 'Kitchen with Amna' was exhibited by Google, who started a food channel with her siblings. Her channel currently possesses 3.75M subscribers, indicating the scope and potential of YouTube in Pakistan to change one's livelihood (Jaffar, 2012). The study also revealed the top 8 video categories on YouTube that attract the most attention among the people of Pakistan, including, Gaming, TV & Movies, Humor videos, News & Daily Talk Shows, Music, Beauty, and Eateries (Saurabh, 2019). The spectrum of YouTube is far wider and more engaging than the broadcast media.

YouTube and (Micro) Celebrity

An online video-streaming site, YouTube, is more than just an entertainment site for some individuals (Abidin, 2020). Earlier, it was a site where only a few users created and uploaded amateur videos, and their subscribers got an alert in the notification section when they uploaded a video. However, many individuals have increased the growth of their YouTube channel to have billions of viewers and millions of subscribers' families. Currently, the most subscribed channel, PewDiePie, has more than 100 million subscribers, and the most viewed channel, Ryan's World, has approx. 39 billion viewers (Lewis, 2019). Other than these two, many other regular individuals have attained success, fame, and celebrity status through this platform. We can only dream of the fame and responsibility these global (micro)celebrities experience.

The money generation through YouTube channels started in mid-2007; YouTube expanded and was purchased by Google (Jackman, 2019). These content creators were invited to YouTube's launch of the Partner Program. This Partner Program allowed the content creators to earn from their uploaded videos. Today, anyone who uploads a video on this platform can generate revenue from YouTube and the advertisements being played on their content. Whenever an advertisement appears at the start of any content creator's video on YouTube, a portion of revenue transfers directly to the creator.

Moreover, when a video of a channel having viewers of billions, Ryan's World, for instance, watches a video, then the money that adds up to the content creator's account can only be imagined by Miller & Bond (2022). However, there is a specific criterion for the content creator to fall upon to enable the option of money generation on their channel. The minimum eligibility criteria consist of five conditions to join this partner program: a content creator should follow all the monetization policies of YouTube, have more than 4000 watch hours, have a 1000 subscribers count, and have an AdSense account. Lastly, the creator lives in a region where this Partner Program is available.

To attain the status of a celebrity or digital entrepreneur on YouTube involves different strategies that these content creators utilize. Over the years, this online video platform has been considerably transformed into a better version so is the users of this platform and their practices. Back at the start of YouTube, people uploaded amateur videos with no story and expert editing. However, the quality content individuals create and upload on their channels is worth appreciating. Now, they spend hours on just the pre-production phase of the video and every day learns new techniques of editing and storytelling to create a professional video for their viewers. As the environment of online networking sites is changing daily, the competition to get more likes, more views, and more fame is also increasing among these creators (Raun, 2018). To increase video popularity, various strategies have been identified by the

researchers. One such strategy identified by Abidin & Brown, (2018) is the deeper analysis of video statistics to determine the popularity of a channel as the likes, views, and the number of comments often provide the clarity and popularity of the content as it is considered equivalent to the creator's success. Another useful strategy to increase and determine the video's popularity is through the YouTube Analytics tool. This tool is considered the most useful for keeping track of the creator's audience. YouTubers can identify their audience geographically and numerically (Dennis, 2022). By simply using this tool, the creator can see what type of content is being liked by their audience. Viewing data from the audience's perspective can help the creator to generate future videos on more audience-preferred content, which would ultimately lead to an increase of the efficacy, reaching more views and watching hours of an individual's channel that would subsequently result in the maximum generation of the revenue (Dezuanni, 2020).

Research Methods

An exploratory research design is used for this study because no earlier research studies are available in the relevant field in the South Asian region. In such cases, exploratory research designs are preferred as they offer a ground or a foundation upon which future investigations can be based (S. Ali et al., 2022). The researchers employed the qualitative research method as it is considered a method used to study human behaviour or where data cannot be quantified (Myers et al., 2010). Further, the Purposive sampling approach is used for data gathering purposes and conducted in-depth interviews for an intensive study with a small population to explore their ideas, practices, or perception about a particular phenomenon (Etikan, 2017). As noted by S. Ali et al. (2022). in-depth interviews, as less structured but more detailed, indicate this method as getting thorough insights about an individual's experience. Notably, the data gathering tool was based on demographic questions (Gender, age, locality, educational level, and employment status) and four prominent themes, further followed by the relevant root questions (See Table 1). Additionally, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten (10) (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan. The interviews were conducted via phone call or zoom, keeping in mind the pandemic situation and the availability of (micro)celebrities.

Table 1: *Themes of Data Gathering in Current Research*

S/R.	Theme
1.	YouTube- in (micro)celebrities' perspective
2.	Practices of (micro)celebrities
3.	Performance of Self and Construction of Authentic Identity
4.	Attention Seeking, Visibility Promotion, and Fan Management

Data Analysis and Findings

Participants' Demographics

The sample consisted of nine male (micro)celebrities and only one female. Additionally, the age of the (micro)celebrities highlighted that among the ten (10) (micro)celebrities, six of the respondents fall under the bracket of thirties ('30s), three (3) under mid-twenties ('20s), and one is the youngest among all who is nineteen (19) years old. All these (micro)celebrities belonged to the major cities of Pakistan. Among the ten (10) (micro)celebrities, five (5) of the respondents live in the largest province of Pakistan (Punjab). In contrast, the other five live in the second most populous metropolis of Pakistan, Karachi (Sindh). The educational background of the (micro)celebrities highlighted that among the ten (10) (micro)celebrities, one of the respondents had an MPhil degree in Mass Communication, and four had a master's degree. Whereas the other five had bachelor's degrees in different fields. Only one participant was a student currently doing a bachelor's in mass communication. Furthermore, five of these ten (10) (micro)celebrities highlighted that their educational background was their starting point for establishing their YouTube channel. They have utilized their degree for both an online (YouTube) and offline job (Formal Job).

Among all the participants, one with a BS degree in Economics identified himself as a full-time YouTuber. When asked about their current employment status, seven out of ten participants identified themselves as either full-time or part-time YouTubers. Thus, most consider running a YouTube channel equivalent to a traditional job. It also reveals that six out of ten respondents do not have any traditional job but consider YouTube their job. At the same time, four out of ten respondents own a business with a YouTube channel. Notably, only one respondent had a traditional job. These responses reveal that for (micro)celebrities in Pakistan, running a YouTube channel is no less than doing a traditional offline job.

YouTube- in (Micro) Celebrities' Perspective

Highlighting the perceptions of micro-celebrities about YouTube, the participants defined it in numerous ways. It can be anything from a global content creation and sharing platform to an entrepreneurial platform where an individual showcases their skills to earn money, to a teacher who teaches you everything, to a platform where an individual can influence millions.

> *"Generally, I see it as the biggest university in the world because there is so much to learn…, As a content creator, I take it as an extremely well-curated tool… I always try to end up teaching someone something."* (Respondent 8, 8 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

It is a site for creating and sharing content and connecting with users globally free of cost. One of the participants said that.

> *"It is an independent and global platform where an individual can start their channel without spending a single penny. I see it as an entrepreneurial platform where a person having a skill can showcase it which would make him earn money even if it is a hobby…, Digital platforms in Pakistan are growing rapidly. Shifts can be seen right now where advertisers are now marketing their content on YouTube."* (Respondent 4, 2 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

Exhibiting the potential of this platform, one of the interviewees said,

> *"I see it as a platform where we can influence others. It has more potential to influence someone than other platforms…, in Pakistan, if a person wants his/her status to move from micro to macro celebrity there are only two easy and quick platforms available i.e., YouTube and TikTok."* (Respondent 2, 5-6 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

A common pattern observed in each respondent's definitions of YouTube is that they all see it as a site to create and share content, a learning aspect, and a free platform to earn money. This can also be understood from the literature review section where the researcher highlighted the reason individuals joining this platform was six figures income with zero investment. When asked how they see this platform as a content creator, one of the respondents said that.

> *"…, Speaking from a personal experience … hmm there is a lot of frustration because of the new algorithms of YouTube. You never know which video will work out for you and which would not. The searchability of content has greatly decreased. One needs to constantly work for good results."* (Respondent 7, 4 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

To identify their practices as a consumer, the respondents were asked about the average time they spend on YouTube and which content category they usually consume. One of the respondents, who is a full-time YouTuber, said that

"That's a lot. This is my job. This is what I do all day. Hmm, that's very normal. To conduct research for my content, be up to date, and know about ongoing YouTube trends." (Respondent 4, 2 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

When inquired about the content category they watch, a common response was observed among the respondents. They all unanimously said videos related to tips and tricks of editing and entertainment. To be well-informed about the current trends on YouTube and create better content in an environment of high competition. A good content creator has to spend a lot of time not as a creator but as a viewer.

The respondents were further asked to identify how YouTube benefits (micro)celebrities in Pakistan and the cons of establishing a YouTube channel. Various themes emerged from the respondents regarding the opportunities provided to them by YouTube. It was highlighted in the literature review section that content creators internationally enjoy being on this platform because they consider it a luxurious career that gives them comfort, freedom of work, and a place where an individual is their boss (Holmbom, 2015). Similar responses were also observed from the (micro)celebrities of Pakistan. One of the respondents said,

"In traditional jobs, we fulfill goals for others but as a YouTuber, we work for ourselves…, 9-5 job just covers our expenses whereas YouTube gives us a chance to live a luxurious and better life...," (Respondent 10, 15 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

Highlighting the perks of being a full-time YouTuber, one of the interviews said,

"Ah… I wake up whenever I want. I always wanted that in life. I'm not a morning person. I always hate waking up against my will…, There is no pressure, constant tension..., I don't have a boss to report and I do work according to my mood…, I had an interest in traveling so that would be only possible with this job." (Respondent 8, 8 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

YouTube as a career option gives an unlimited incentive to (micro)celebrities internationally and in Pakistan. All the respondents unanimously agreed that YouTube in Pakistan offers more benefits to (micro)celebrities and fewer disadvantages. A few common responses that appeared from the respondents were that YouTube offers more freedom to choose working hours, more independence with no boss, which in turn creates more space for creativity, a free platform that requires no subscription fee or investment to enable us to broadcast our skills and YouTube, particularly in Pakistan provides numerous avenues to (micro)celebrities to earn money. One of the interviewees said,

"There are a lot of merits as it is an avenue to make good money from multiple sources..., In Pakistan, if a creator comes in the limelight, it is directly proportional to getting more fame, sponsors, and promotions." (Respondent 9, 3 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

Finally, the first theme was concluded by asking the respondents how they see the future of YouTube in Pakistan. The majority believed that the future of YouTube in Pakistan is bright, but they need to catch up compared to YouTubers in other regions. The reason mentioned by respondents was that the 3 years ban on YouTube in Pakistan had affected the scope of (micro)celebrities to excel and get recognition globally. One of the respondents said,

"..., we need to put an end to this banning culture in Pakistan. After the ban was lifted many genuine Pakistani content creators and their content got promoted globally...," (Respondent 2, 5-6 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

To achieve a brighter future, a lot of hard work and consistently good content are required to give competition to others. One of the respondents said,

"To consider that Pakistan has achieved global recognition it would be evident when the YouTube fan fest would happen in Pakistan…, it has happened thrice in India but not once in Pakistan. Constant hard work and good content are required but we don't talk about it because creators in Pakistan love to live in their comfort zone and do not want to work and excel." (Respondent 6, 1 year of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

Few respondents believed that the banning of YouTube in Pakistan resulted in a reason for not being able to achieve global recognition yet. In contrast, others believed that they could still achieve that status. All it requires is constant hard work. Few respondents also believed that YouTube is the future of Pakistan as its popularity is increasing daily. One of the participants said,

"YouTube is the future of Pakistan…, the employment ratio among people of Pakistan has greatly resulted in people moving towards digital platforms to earn where there are more opportunities." (Respondent 10, 15 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

Highlighting the brighter future of YouTube in Pakistan, one of the interviewees said,

"We are on the road towards global recognition…. We have YouTubers with millions of subscribers a lot would join in the coming days…. more people on YouTube means more cost per view…." (Respondent 5, 1.5 years of experience as a (micro)celebrity on YouTube)

Responses revealed that after the ban on YouTube was lifted in Pakistan. A shift was observed where many content creators joined it to make a living. It's been 5 years since the ban was lifted, and a lot of quality content and Consistency are required to reach the level of global popularity. Respondents were positive that content creators in Pakistan would compete strongly with creators from other countries in the future as YouTube's popularity in Pakistan is accelerating rapidly in the current COVID situation where everything has been digitalized.

Practices of (micro)celebrities

To understand the mutual practices performed by (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan, the respondents were asked what common practices every YouTuber does in Pakistan. One of the respondents said,

"Creators involved in fake fights with each other to generate hype for their channel…, just like 10-15 years back Lollywood actresses used to practice to come in the limelight…, Which leads to quick fame."

Another respondent said,

"When the creators get out of the content, they tend to intentionally engage in fake fights and controversies to get views…, not an ethical practice, but our audience enjoys it and it gets creator views on a video."

Another response that was observed among the respondents was that,

"…, No one is generating unique content…, a common practice in our content on YouTube is that everyone is copy-pasting content of others. Influencing from what others are doing and practicing the same thing in their videos…, well, not only in Pakistan. Indians copy content of foreigners and Pakistanis are following Indians."

Elaborating on copying Indian content, one of the respondents said,

"Vulgarity and abusive content are very common on YouTube in Pakistan now…. They see that such content is gaining more fame in India, and they are also following it to be seen as funny, they use abusive language and create vulgar content."

These responses highlighted that the common practices being performed among (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan are all negative, including engaging in controversies and fake fights, copy-pasting content of others and using abusive language, and creating vulgar content. No respondent believed that there are any healthy or positive common practices that creators are performing on YouTube. Where few content creators are striving to achieve global recognition, such negative common practices are damaging the image of Pakistan internationally. One of the interviewees believed that YouTubers are just dragging content with no innovation under the name of vlogging.

In the literature review section, researchers identified strategies for growth and popularity on a YouTube channel, including creating niche content, sharing from a personal experience, disseminating content across other platforms, and scrutinizing video statistics (Blade, 2020). To identify those strategies in Pakistan, respondents were asked about the key practices to growth and popularity on YouTube. Numerous factors emerged from the responses, which clear the picture towards the road to popularity and growth of a channel in Pakistan. One of the respondents said,

> *"Clickbait is one of the successful practices to increase growth and popularity of a video…, Clickbait thumbnail is different from a regular thumbnail…, and its purpose is to attract attention and encourage people to click on a link…, everyone is doing it."*

Few respondents highlighted that setting an attractive thumbnail, caption, and video description generate similar results. Most respondents believed that Clickbait is one of the successful tactics to create curiosity among people to watch the video. One of the respondents emphasizing the use of Clickbait said that it doesn't matter what is the content of the video what matters is the catchy thumbnail where the purpose is to get views.

Another key factor to the growth and popularity of YouTube in Pakistan that emerged from the responses was Consistency. One of the interviewees said,

> *"To grow your channel… umm… you need to post not only quality content but um… consistently too. There should be enough content for people to consume before asking someone to follow you."*

Consistency in uploading content on YouTube was believed as a major key to the growth and popularity of one's channel in Pakistan. Where quality content was highlighted, putting up with Consistency was also mentioned by many respondents. The reason stated by the respondents was that the need for Consistency is not only to maintain the audience, but it is also useful for YouTube algorithms to track your content.

An additional recurrent theme that emerged from the respondents was that since YouTube is a video streaming site, there are more chances for female (micro)celebrities to gain success and popularity faster than male (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan.

> *"…, well, my fellow YouTubers often get triggered by my opinion but honestly, in a society like Pakistan, it is easier for a female content creator to be famous more quickly than a male creator…."*

Sharing similar views, another respondent said that,

> *"People love to see beautiful faces talking to them…; female creators have more chances in Pakistan to be famous. We [male creators] have to be funny or try some other tactic to be famous…."*

In addition to the above-mentioned key practices, a few respondents also believed that making content in a local language can generate desired results. One of the respondents' believed that it depends upon the audience of a YouTuber's channel. If it is meant for the people of Pakistan, they should make videos in the local language 'Urdu' because then more people would be able to understand and relate to your content. He believed that if a creator's audience includes a foreign audience, they can also add subtitles to make it understandable for them.

After asking the last question about the practices interviewees generally observe on YouTube in Pakistan, the respondents were asked about the common practices or trends they are exercising on YouTube to identify whether there exists a relationship between the practices highlighted by them about others' content and their practices. A majority said they often practice Clickbait tactics on their channel to get more views. Additionally, to get more views, a few respondents said that they bring the factor of relevance in their content which bears good results for them. They believe that they make content according to the current topics and events happening in Pakistan because when something is a hot topic, people search more about it. Their content automatically falls into the search algorithms of YouTube. However, one of the respondents with the maximum years of experience on YouTube said he needs to follow a trend. Instead, he makes a trend for others to follow. He said he always introduces something new on their channel and covers those segments others need to discuss.

Performance of Self and Construction of Authentic Identity

The interviewees were asked about their video format as part of the self-performance tactic. The responses that emerged were quite similar. The common format among the (micro)celebrities was including a teaser at the start of the video, which shows the highlights of a complete video and the use of a catchy phrase or a signature word either during or at the end of the video, which according to them had become a trademark of their videos by which their audiences associate them. One of the respondents said that.

> "I usually start my video with a teaser of 10-15 seconds which includes the highlights of the video…; at the end of the video, I add "bas" or ". [dot]," which shows that the video is ended. If the video contains part 2 as well, then I add "? [question mark] at the end of the video, which can be seen in all my videos."

Another respondent said,

> "Using the word 'Khali balli' has somewhat become my signature which my audience associates with me…, it has become my trademark that I've started a merch of printed mug and t-shirts having the phrase 'Khali balli' and audience are buying it.,"

These responses highlight that the use of a catchy phrase certainly adds a touch of affiliation of a (micro)celebrity among its audience, which was also mentioned in the literature review section where researchers argued the use of a catchy phrase in a video adds association and relatability between the creator and its audience.

The next question to identify the performance of self and construction of authentic identity practices from the respondents was whether their channel name is similar to their real-life name. Responses revealed that 7 out of 10 respondents had a name different from their real-life name. One of the interviewees said,

> "No one uses their real-life name on YouTube…, [mentioning his channel's name] this is my stage name by which the audience identifies me on YouTube, [mentioning his real-life name] and this is my real life."

When the reason was asked for choosing a name other than their real-life name, one of the respondents said,

> "…, when I started vlogging, the word 'vlogger' was quite popular among people…. People used to search about it…, having a goal to become a brand; I also used it."

Goffman's understanding of performance is clear from the respondents' responses. Most of the respondents started their channel with a different name than their real-life name and have maintained it to date; once they established this new identity at the start of their channel, they dedicated themselves to constant impression management (Goffman, 1959).

To understand the significance of authenticity practice among microcelebrities on YouTube in Pakistan, they were asked how important they think creating an authentic image online is. A unanimous response was observed among the respondents. They all believed it is essential for a (micro)celebrity to practice it. Still, the reality they show in videos is constructed, which seems authentic to the audience but is not. One of the respondents said,

> *"It is certainly very important to show an authentic image online…, but what we show is constructed…; everything is planned and scripted on YouTube…, and camera and frame are set before recording a video, so what appears in that frame is real [constructed]."*

Another respondent said,

> *"Authenticity is important, but it is constructed because people are not interested in someone's real life, which is boring, so we have to add something other than usual to make it interesting for the audience."*

The majority also believed that it is important to maintain this impression because if it reveals in the future, a creator loses their identity and faces a severe backlash. The story of a Pakistani (micro)celebrity was quoted by one of the respondents who projected an online identity different from his real identity. Still, his real identity was revealed when a few of her class fellows shared screenshots of their chat. He received a severe backlash, resulting in the loss of creditability among his audience.

Further elaborating on the existence of a constructed and an idealized identity as a common practice among YouTubers in Pakistan, the respondents revealed that a fusion is needed in content where a creator must show 70% of constructed reality and 30% of actual reality to make the content worth watching. The reason for this given by respondents was that the audience wants to see creators living a life they can't afford or wish to live. A respondent shared an example of practising constructed identity. He said,

> *"We normally spend Sunday in mix-matched clothes, or it would not be wrong to say that in homeless condition, but if I'm making a video to show my routine on the weekend, then I would wear a branded 2-chord PJ set to show myself presentable to my audience."*

Another respondent said,

> *"I can state it with a fact that many creators are so deeply involved in this practice that they are not real anymore."*

Therefore, to be liked, loved, and get validation from the audience all the time (micro), celebrities are exercising this practice of constructed identity, which raises the question about the credibility of the (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan. If everything according to them is constructed, why are they getting immense fame from the audience? A possible reason can be that the YouTube audience in Pakistan is passive. They are consuming content, liking it, and believing it is real without verification. Extended research on both YouTube audiences and (micro)celebrities on YouTube perceptions and practices by future researchers can explore this dimension.

Further understanding the performance of self and identity construction practices performed by (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan, the respondents were asked what practices they perform on their channel to create authenticity in content. Various common responses emerged. Few respondents believed that sharing details about their personal life, including their daily routine, information about other social media platforms to connect with them, showing their house, and involving family members in the video is one way to add authenticity to content. One of the interviewees said,

> *"…, This is why vlogs are so famous. The audience is so heavily invested in watching such content that they want to see how my bedroom is decorated, which products I use in the bathroom, and honestly, I make videos on such topics because it sells."*

Another respondent said,

> *"I often make videos on issues faced by the people in Karachi…, and I always use my local language, Urdu, in videos. This adds a sense of relatability for them."*

Like Goffman's suggested dramaturgical practices (1959), few respondents said that they pre-planned the content before making a video but projected it to the audience as if they were experiencing it for the first time with them. When the reason was asked, one of the interviewees said,

> *"There is a famous saying, fake it till you make it. It is not necessary to show the raw details of your real life instead add a flavor to it…, because people like it."*

Another respondent said,

> *"You see if you watch my recent and earlier videos you would see that I'm the same guy with the same style and accent which I was in my first video back in 2016. This increases authenticity."*

Therefore, sharing personal details, talking about the audience's issue, and speaking in the local language to give a sense of access and relatability to the audience (Jerslev 2016; Sugg.Z., 2014), impression management and excessive coherence are the key common practices that have been exercising by (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan.

Attention Seeking, Visibility Promotion, and Fan management

The next theme of this study highlights the attention-seeking, visibility promotion, and fan management practices exercised by Pakistani (micro)celebrities on YouTube. For this purpose, the participants were asked about the purpose of joining this platform to understand the existence of attention-seeking intention among them and various strategies that they perform on YouTube to seek attention, be more visible, and their fan management practices. When asked about the purpose of joining this platform, two common responses emerged, one was to get fame and attention, and peers suggested the other to start a channel on YouTube. Data collected from the participants indicate that in addition to fame, peer suggestion also serves as a reason to join and start a channel on YouTube. Intending to join this platform for attention and fame, one of the respondents said.

> *"… In my opinion, why we see so many YouTubers in Pakistan these days is because everyone wants fame and attention. Those who say they don't want attention then they are lying."*

After identifying the intentions of joining this platform among the Pakistani (micro)celebrities, the next question was how they exercise these practices. The practices like fan base maintenance, knowing one's fans, responding to them, interacting with them, and breaking the traditional audience/performer dichotomy are key practices by which attention can be achieved (Burke et al., 2009). All the respondents believed that interaction with viewers is considerably important to get quick fame and attention. Additionally, respondents highlighted that interaction is important for a channel's growth because when a (micro)celebrity interacts with the audience, it increases engagement. When engagement occurs on a video, it automatically comes in YouTube algorithms. YouTube puts high-engagement videos in suggestions for others which ultimately results in the growth of a channel with more views and more subscribers. Emphasizing the importance of interaction, one of the respondents said,

> *"Viewers are the reason for our bread and butter. They are the reason we get engagement and reach on our channel, and because of that reach, we get paid promotions. If we don't interact with them then it's a huge loss for a content creator."*

Where interaction was believed as a core practice to get attention and growth, only some participants highlighted that interacting too much is also a disadvantage to a creator's image. The participants believed if a (micro)celebrity engages or interacts with all, a general assumption among the Pakistani audience

would be that the creator is just like any other random person they would take for granted and think about him as less of a celebrity. One of the interviewees said,

> *"This is a wrong practice because that way nobody feels you are special. A right practice would be if I reply to 2/10 comments then others would think that if they curate their comment better next time, there might be a chance to get a reply."*

This highlights the mindset of the audience/viewers in Pakistan's context, which could be further investigated by researching audience perception about (micro)celebrities' practices in future research. Further, the participants were asked about the fan interaction practices that they perform on their channel. Numerous responses emerged. The most recurrent responses were through comments, YouTube stories, live sessions, asking for audiences' feedback, and using pronouns (YouTube Fam, You guys). Practices like engaging with the audience through comments, YouTube stories, and live sessions serve as an addition to the literature.

After highlighting attention-seeking practices performed by (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan, the participants were asked about the practice they perform on their channel to make their content more visible and which brings it into the limelight. A recurrent response that was observed among respondents was to be meme material for the audience. They believed that doing something out of the box, funny, or notorious was viral faster in Pakistan. Quoting the example of a recent case, one of the respondents said,

> *"Dananeer [micro-celebrity] is the prime example of it. She added a funny clip in her video where she faked her accent and said, "Pawrri horahi hai" which went viral globally. From Indian celebrities to foreign cricketers, everyone made a video on it, and now she a celebrity for all."*

Another common practice observed from the responses to be more visible was understanding and using YouTube algorithms. Respondents highlighted a few tricks that make it easy for YouTube to track our data and make it to trending topics. Use of an attractive thumbnail, adding most search tags, making videos on immediate happenings of a country, and Consistency are some of the practices that the respondents highlighted. They practice making their videos more visible on YouTube in Pakistan.

A researcher argued that fan maintenance and interaction (micro)celebrities must always be available on this platform, regardless of the content they post online (Duguay, 2019). To identify whether this practice is useful or not, the respondents were asked that in their opinion, what matters the most, quality content or quantity of content. The responses highlighted an unclear picture to generalize the result, as half of the participants' quantity was more important, and the other half's quality content was more important. However, analyzing their reasons, it was observed that for growth and engagement, quantity matters more. As one of the respondents said,

> *"Frequency matters more for YouTube to track our videos which leads to more engagement and growth. Content can be improved with time, but if one has a goal to grow, frequency should not be compromised."*

However, conducting an in-depth analysis of what matters more on YouTube by future researchers can generate a clear picture of this dimension.

Theoretical Implications

From the (Micro)Celebrity model, two basic concepts emerge, 'Celebrity' and 'Practices/Performance', to view and understand the phenomenon of (micro)celebrities. (Boyd et al., 2011) explained the concept of 'Celebrity' as a practice people use online to engage with others. They argued that these ordinary individuals adopt attention-seeking strategies and practices to gain attention online on social networking sites; "to construct a consumable persona the practice of celebrity involves authenticity and access, ongoing fan base maintenance and performed intimacy" (Feller & Burroughs, 2022). This study will also elaborate on a few other practices as well which have been impressively worked out by M. Y. Ali et al.

(2019), i.e., Attention seeking, visibility promotion, and Fan management [identified as (micro) celebrities' core practices]. Among these practices in a micro-celebrity model, there is another practice, Performed Sexuality, on which work was majorly based. Due to the time limitation and the broad nature of research objectives, covering all these themes and practices is impossible to cover in one study as each practice requires an in-depth investigation. However, further scholars can explore this practice separately (Usher, 2020). The relevant model closely relates to the aim and objectives of this study. Since it's a new model, it needs to be tested further, which would ultimately contribute to the (micro)celebrity studies (Usher, 2020).

Conclusion

This research study was conducted to see the practices of (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan. The term (micro)celebrity surfaced on the educational map in 2008. (Micro)celebrity studies are a relatively new concept that emerged as a field when "Teri Senft" coined the term to explain online performance where people utilize audio and video technology and different social networking platforms that boosts their popularity amongst the online audience. With the inception of the internet, particularly social media sites, a shift was observed among audience preferences. Viewers watching patterns shifted from traditional media towards participatory media, which made the content consumers more powerful by giving them the control to become content producers. Overall, this research concluded that, by producing content for online media, these individuals could earn considerable influence and popularity and even achieve celebrity status. Since many (micro)celebrities emerged on YouTube worldwide, the relevant concept is also booming in Pakistan.

Study Limitations

This contains a few limitations that narrow down its scope. First, there needed to be more previous research in Pakistan's context to study this concept. This also made primary data unavailable to build the basis of practices. Therefore, investigations of different regions were utilized to study the concept for reference and building arguments. Second, for two reasons, limited research resources also hindered the driving out of the practices from the top-notch (micro)celebrities on YouTube in Pakistan. Firstly, they demanded a minimum of 30 thousand Pakistani rupees to give half an hour of their time. Secondly, because they were in different Pakistan and financial constraints restricted travelling to these cities within Pakistan. Third, the country-wide lockdown due to the pandemic situation, followed by the closure of educational institutes, and later the busy schedule of (micro)celebrities delayed the process of getting the required data from the respondents in each time frame. Finally, there needs to be a definite theoretical structure to study and investigate the topic under study from different dimensions also served as a barrier. Therefore, a relatively new model was utilized to understand the concept.

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