RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONTENT CREATORS OR CONSUMERS? A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF WRITING OR (NOT WRITING) ON FACEBOOK BY TELUGU YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the online content creation habits of Telugu young adults on Facebook. A method of questionnaire incorporating the demographic profile of the informants and their content creation practices on Facebook has been adopted to find out a correlation between sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, medium of instruction, and their content creation habits. The survey data analyzed in this paper shows that active content creators on Facebook are a minority among the total Facebook users. Many people are consuming the content created by a few. It is also observed that the majority of the content creators tend to have urban, elite, and English medium backgrounds compared to those who are generally content with consuming the online content.

Keywords: Content creation, Content consumption, Online content

Introduction

During pre-internet days, the creation and distribution of content was always an expensive and challenging process. Until two or three decades ago, only the privileged such as a few politicians, celebrities, intellectuals, poets, writers, had the opportunity of expressing themselves and sharing their ideas with a larger audience.

The general public was less likely to be able to express their opinions. There were no platforms available for the average citizen to express their views, except in a few columns such as Letters to the Editor in newspapers or in a few radio and TV documentary programs. It was almost impossible for laymen to express themselves or share their various hidden talents with people outside their circles.

However, the advent of the internet has changed everything. One of the numerous impacts of the internet has been the rapid rise of so many platforms for the public to create content, distribute information, share their opinions, and exhibit their talents. Websites, blogs, social networking sites such as *Twitter*, *Facebook, Instagram*, photo and video sharing sites such as *Flickr* and *YouTube*, content sharing sites such as *Wikipedia* provide various windows to users to create and share content. The growth of such content creation opportunities has been considered as heralding a new economic model (Benkler, 2006). The phenomenon has also been regarded as a cultural and political emancipatory force (Bruns, 2008).

This paper is based on the major assumption that despite having a lot of opportunities to create content, many people, especially the young, are failing to create much content online. With the help of available research and data, this paper tries to present the issues related to content creation and investigate sociolinguistic barriers, if any, the process. The first part of this paper deals with the stratification of the content creation practices on Facebook, and the second part deals with the survey results and conclusion.

What is Content

The biggest challenge faced by any researcher dealing with the phenomenon of online content creation is the remarkably fluid definition of 'content'. There is no widely accepted definition of user-created online content. According to a report for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'user-created content' should *i)* be published, *ii)* involve creative effort, and *iii)* be created outside of professional routines and practices. While we can easily identify the condition of being published, what is 'creative' and what is 'not creative' is very difficult to define. Creativity, to a large extent, is very subjective and contextual. In the contemporary era where the boundaries of professional and personal lives are very thin, it is complicated to ascertain if users' content is actually outside their professional routines and practices. The current study is limited to content creation on Facebook, and, hence, the questions in the online survey try to elicit the information regarding the following aspects:

1) Do the participants post anything created by them?

2) Do the participants not post anything at all?

3) Do the participants post after remixing the content already available on the internet?

Types of Content

It is imperative to establish types of content. Content published online cannot be 'all the same' or 'all different.' The type of content is a very crucial variable. Based on British data from the 2011 Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS), three types of content, i.e., 1) Skilled content, 2) Social and entertainment content, 3) Political content (Blank 2013). However, a fourth type, Personal content, has been included in the survey for the current paper. The present study does not get into the nuances of content stratification and types. The study's main objective is to know how many of the participants post something on Facebook solely created by them or at least remixed by them. These posts can be personal updates, photos, audio and video clips., artwork, etc.

A few predictors of content creation

There exists a strong relationship between several social, sociolinguistic, socio-demographic variables and content creation. The prominent ones are age, gender, locale, social status, employment status, education background, and language proficiency. In addition, a few other variables such as creativity, internet skills, personal experiences on the Internet (positive and negative), general technical ability, comfort levels about revealing or sharing personal information, assertiveness on the internet, and general technology attitudes are also associated with the practice of content creation.

What drives online content creation

Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007 outlined three essential attributes that act as drivers of content creation online: Technological, Social, and Economical. Technological drivers include increased broadband availability, processing speeds coupled with lower costs for mobile phones, the rise of multiple technologies, simpler software tools to create, distribute, and share content. Social Drivers include willingness to engage online, no objections to revealing personal information, desire to express oneself, fulfilling some societal functions (non-profit work, social work, social engagement, politics).

Economic Drivers include lower prices and availability of tools to create content, lower entry barriers, increased possibilities to finance-related ventures and investment possibilities, business models to monetise content, easier copyright laws etc.

Inhibiting factors

According to a few studies that outline the inhibiting factors behind online content creation, the barriers to online content creation are the perceived notions held by the social media users about their language proficiency, storytelling abilities, creativity etc. Another important factor is their attitude towards the use and usefulness of social media platforms. Most of these opinions are influenced by the users' age, gender and other sociolinguistic factors.

Questionnaire and data collection

A questionnaire was designed to obtain participants' biographical data such as gender, age, and educational background, including medium of instruction. Apart from the basic information, questions to know more details about their content creation practices on Facebook were included in the questionnaire. The items regarding posting content on Facebook answered on a five-point scale, i.e., Very frequently - Frequently - Sometimes - Rarely - Never.

The questionnaire was shared as an online form among 125 young adults aged 18-25 years - all of whom are engineering undergraduates - considering that many of them are avid social media users. Besides administering the questionnaire, 17 of the participants were also personally interviewed to know the reasons behind their posting or not posting content on Facebook. Following are the highlights of the findings:

- **More than 85% of the participants are Tech-savvy and heavy internet users.**

- More than half of the participants have never posted anything original on Facebook

- Out of the 35% of the Facebook content creators, only 13% post content on a regular basis.

- About 14% of the participants post remixed content.

- Most of the original content creators are either from urban or English medium backgrounds.

- Female participants post much less content compared to their male counterparts.

- The most popular Content Creating activities are sharing their pictures.

- **Older boys lead the Facebook activity among young adults.**

- The major reasons for people not posting at all or posting less frequently are their self-perceived inferior language skills, apprehensions about revealing their personal info, lack of in-depth awareness about various socio-political issues, reservations about getting judged by others.

Demographics of the Telugu Young Adults who post self-created content on Facebook Total Participants: 125 (Male-71, Female-54; Urban-43, Semi Urban-45, Rural-37; English Medium: 90, Telugu Medium-35; Below 20yrs- 73, between 20yrs and 25yrs-52) ***The Percentage of the participants in each group who POST content they have created***	
Age	
Below 20 years	29%
20- 25 years	37%
Gender	
Male	41%
Female	27%

G. NARENDER REDDY, Prof. MOHAMMAD ANSARI

Locale	
Urban	49%
Semi-Urban	32%
Rural	21%
Education Background (Medium of Instruction)	
Telugu Medium	20%
English Medium	34%

Demographics of Telugu Young Adults who never post self-created content on FB	
Total Participants: 125 (Male-71, Female-54; Urban-43, Semi Urban-45, Rural-37; English Medium: 90, Telugu Medium-35; Below 20yrs- 73, between 20yrs and 25yrs-52)	
The Percentage of the participants in each group who DO NOT POST any content on FB	
Age	
Below 20 years	54%
20- 25 years	50%
Gender	
Male	45%
Female	62%
Locale	
Urban	31%
Semi-Urban	43%
Rural	65%
Education Background (Medium of Instruction)	
Telugu Medium	69%
English Medium	52%

Demographics of the Telugu Young Adults who post remixed content on Facebook	
Total Participants: 125 (Male-71, Female-54; Urban-43, Semi Urban-45, Rural-37; English Medium: 90, Telugu Medium-35; Below 20yrs- 73, between 20yrs and 25yrs-52)	
The Percentage of the participants who POST remix content	
Age	
Below 20 years	17%
20- 25 years	13%
Gender	
Male	14%
Female	11%
Locale	
Urban	20%
Semi-Urban	25%
Rural	14%
Education Background (Medium of Instruction)	
Telugu Medium	11%
English Medium	14%

Discussion, conclusion

From the evidence provided by the study, it seems that Facebook content creators tend to be a minority. Despite the availability of various social networking platforms, most young adults are reluctant to create content. Instead, they end up being mere consumers of the content. Sociolinguistic factors such as gender, educational qualifications, and medium of instruction determine the online content creation practices. People hailing from urban or semi-urban locales are more active content creators than their counterparts from rural areas. It's interesting to know that many participants have a strong urge to be part of social networking. However, many of them end up posting only images, emojis, and GIFs or simply sharing the content created by others as they are not confident about creating original verbal content. No wonder many young users worldwide prefer being on social networking sites such as Instagram or Snapchat, which are predominantly photo/video sharing platforms.

G. NARENDER REDDY, Prof. MOHAMMAD ANSARI

Limitations and future research directions

The current study is confined to the content creation habits of young Telugu adults on only Facebook. More research and conceptual work are necessary to study the practices of online content creators across all age groups and all other online content-sharing platforms and social networking sites.

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