

Changing Content Creation in the Age of Prosumer: from Individual to Multi-Channel
Networks

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Abstract

In a rapidly-changing information environment, it is necessary to stay up-to-date with industry trends to be productive (Austin, 2013). Particularly in an era where short videos dominate social media, a step has been taken from user generated content to professionally generated content. Multi-channel networks (MCN) have emerged, first, as assisting agencies for YouTube in the United States since at least 2013, providing creative media management services. This prosperous model emerged in China in 2015. Papitube represents a typical switch from a single influential media prosumer to a matrix of content creators. Despite the visible rise of MCNs, few studies look into their mechanism and systematically investigate its effects on changing the power dynamics of content creators in the short video industry compared with individual work. As investment and public attention continue to flow toward MCNs, it is necessary to address value and strategy questions so as to give basic directions to future studies concerning MCNs' vitality.

This study first draws literature about cultural industries as the ground for content creation, then reviews the practice of individuals and organizations in content production. The literature together helps identify a set of measurement objectives of MCNs' performances that are referred to in the following analyses. Next, the study adopts a qualitative document analysis approach and content analysis approach to examine the case of Papitube and its partners. The objective is to summarize stated values of Papitube in existing documents and analyze changes in content creation of prosumers through a content

analysis of Papitube members' social media performance with and without an MCN so as to identify what changes do MCNs bring to individual content creators in Chinese social media market and whether they are valuable.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Taking advantage of social media platforms, individuals are empowered to create their own content, get increasing attention and become micro-celebrities, who ‘involves people “amping up” their popularity over the Web using techniques like video, blogs, and social networking sites’ (Senft, as cited in Marwick & boyd, 2011). However, with new organizations entering the field, the power dynamics may have changed.

Gillmor initially raised the concept of ‘we-media’, referring to grassroot journalists who are originally content receivers and turn into reporters on the Internet (2006, p. 15). Now the phenomenon of citizen journalism and the wider trend of user-generated content (UGC) have ushered “the age of prosumer” (Ritzer et al, 2012). Prosumers, or producer-consumers, consume the goods and services they produce (Toffler & Toffler, 1981).

Due to new media technologies that lowered access barriers, UGC permeate on social media platforms and start to professionalize (Liu, 2016). In recent years, more professionally-generated content (PGC) is found belonging to an agency, which is known as multi-channel networks (MCN). First coined by YouTube, MCNs worked to aggregate, affiliate with, and/or manage YouTube channels by providing diverse assistant services in exchange of the ad revenue (Cunningham, Craig & Silver, 2016). It has then developed into what Gardner and Lehnert (2016) define as any entity or organization that partners with content creators or directly produces a variety of distinctive content and works to perform business and marketing functions via the platform whereby said content is released.

The professionalization enables amateur-produced videos to enhance the quality;

however, only a few content creators have opportunities to professionalize their approach. (Kim, 2012). In Chinese context, MCNs serve as a viable solution for the dilemma where only a few of the rapidly increasing grassroots content creators are capable of maintaining the audience and have access to professional help and various resources (Guo, 2015). This model has been thriving since the term was imported in 2015. In 2016, many Chinese PGC teams announced their transformation into MCNs (Dongdongbiji, 2017). According to *2017 China's Internet Celebrity Economy Development Report*, MCNs have been playing a more and more important role in the social media ecology. Major social media platforms like Weibo have announced their plan to cooperate with MCN institutes in 2017 (Cheng & Ouyang, 2017). Up to the first half of 2017, the number of MCNs in cooperation with Weibo hit 480, rising by 220.0% compared to 2016 (iResearch, 2017). In general, content creators have been experiencing a shift from working alone to working with an MCN, and MCNs will continue to be the trend of UGC, as the current investment flow indicates (Dongdongbiji, 2017).

Despite the noticeable rise of MCNs, few studies have reasoned MCNs' popularity among individual content creators. In fact, little research has focused on the changes brought by MCNs - whether MCNs empower individual content creators by distributing resources or take away power from them instead. The questions that arise are: what changes do MCNs bring to individual content creators? Do individuals benefit from these changes? If they do, *what is the value of MCNs in terms of contributing to social media success and creating value for content creators compared to individual content creators?*

In order to tackle this topic, a case study of Papitube is conducted in this study. In 2017, Papitube ranks first on the list of MCNs in China; it adopts the original and typical model of MCNs compared to other such agencies in China (Dongdongbiji, 2017). Papitube was launched by Papi, one of the top micro-celebrities on Weibo, the most-used social media platform in China. A micro-celebrity is, as Marwick (2015) stated, a self-presentation technique in which people inhabit the celebrity subject position by using strategic intimacy that appeals to followers, who are regarded as fans. Papi started as an independent vlogger who became famous at the beginning of 2016 (Qin, 2016). To date Papitube has recruited more than 30 vloggers and is followed by 1.25 million Weibo users (Han, 2017). With Papi's boost and distributed resources, some of the Papitubers, who were with no more than 20 thousand followers at the time they were recruited, are followed by more than 1 million Weibo users to date. Though in terms of its original mission to satisfy the various entertainment demands of social media users, there has not been significant achievements, and the phenomenon of "Papi fatigue" toward the recruited Papitubers is reported among the audiences (Nan, 2017).

In this study, a review of literature is conducted about the power construction in the communication of culture industries regarding the social stratification theory and characteristics of virtual communities, and the content creation practice of individuals and organizations. This body of literature review together helps to develop measurement objectives of MCNs' success. Through a case study of Papitube combining a qualitative document analysis of relevant news articles, official notices and other information shared

online with a qualitative content analysis of Papitubers' social media posts, Papitube's stated values and strategies are reported and their actual effects on Papitubers, especially regarding the content production, are discussed.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Centering around MCNs' values and effects, this study reviews literature in three dimensions. On macro-level, this topic is located in social media environment; on meso-level, MCNs as organizations, the organizational structure is worth studying as an organization's performance is influenced by its structure (Child, 1972; Dalton et al., 1980); on micro-level, the move of prosumers' practice and production is worth reviewing because the literature indicates the challenges that individual content creators face and what kind of assistance they may need to improve their performance, which helps understand the reason why multi-channel networks are attractive.

Therefore, literature about social media success, MCNs' organizational mechanism and the content production of social media content creators as producer-consumers is discussed. To be specific, the evolving definition of media success and social stratification theory in virtual communities are reviewed to shed light on indicators of social media success and the communication within structured virtual communities; prosumer practice and the move from UGC, PGC to MCN work are then reviewed to specify the concerns of content creators and give a general view of MCNs. Finally, the case study of Papitube is introduced as the basis of the following analysis and discussion.

Through a review of literature, it was inferred that MCNs may function to fill the gap between amateur content creation and professional content creation. Measurement of MCNs' values are drawn from the practice of social media and prosumers, such as user subjectivity, relationship with audiences, quality and amount of information sharing and relationship with MCN members.

2.1 Power Construction in Cultural Industries

Power dynamics changing with the evolution of cultural industries and MCNs entering the field, it is necessary to investigate the changes on the ground of cultural industries first. The literature in this section includes cultural industry studies, the social stratification theory and studies about virtual communities, aiming to sort out evidences how power has been constructed within cultural industries, who has been involved in this process, and the changes in the age of Web 2.0.

2.1.1 Who is Involved: Producers and Audiences

It is worth identifying who is involved in the process of power construction in cultural industries. According to Jeffery (1994), cultural industries are the enterprises that arrange the production, distribution, exhibition, sales, and promotion of the live and recorded media available to audience. Audiences have been attached particular importance back to the discussion of culture industry in 1940s. Adorno and Horkheimer (1947) suggested a one-way flow from producers to consumers in production by using the term "culture industry" to distinguish from "mass culture" or "mass media", emphasizing that the cultural industry's products do not serve to convey the representations of the masses of people

(Adorno, 1975).

This idea is problematized for adopting an elitist perspective and are rejected by the following Birmingham groups that introduced an active audience that creates meanings (Holt and Perren, 2009, p.4). Fiske also argues that the audience constructs relevance and can produce meaning beyond the economic intention of text, or even co-construct meaning in social contexts. With meaning circulating through the discourse, audiences turn into producers of meanings; while for the cultural industries, the key to success lie in the ability to produce a good range of meanings that serve the “diverse and often oppositional interests of its audiences” (Fiske, 1987, p. 326).

The discussion about cultural industry products further demonstrates the interrelation between producers and audiences. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) argued that in culture industries, what is artwork by appearance is in fact dependent on industry and oriented by money and power. In contrast with functionless autonomous arts, products of culture industries are standardized, determined by predicted needs. Every work of art is turned into a consumer product and was shaped by the logic of capitalist rationality. In this way, media content is presented in a standard fashion and time order so as to appeal to the largest portion of the public, in which high and low culture are combined and the boundaries between them are blurred.

To sum up, producers and audiences are two interrelated ends of cultural industry production. In cultural industries, audiences’ needs are highly valued. With their needs to be predicted as guidelines of production, audiences are empowered to become producers

of meanings.

2.1.2 Power Construction

Understanding the roles of producers and audiences in cultural industry production, the concept of power is interpreted accordingly – at the producer end, power is related to the ability to produce content; at the audience or consumer end, power is built upon the ability to gain audiences. In this section, I will use social stratification theories to explain how is power constructed thus stratifying a community.

2.1.2.2 Social Stratification Theories

Many studies have been centered around social stratification. Among classical stratification theories, Marxist theory used ownership of the means of production for stratification, while Weber (1947) saw three intersecting dimensions of stratification (class, status, and party). Durkheim emphasized the role of occupation in social stratification and the formation of social norms (Bourdieu, 1987).

Modern theories took a further step. Neo-Marxist theory supplemented the middle class into the stratification theory and added organizational assets and technological assets as basis of the stratification frame (Burris, 1987). Neo-Weberism developed distinctions between manual and nonmanual workers, combination between occupational and social class (Burris, 1987). Parsons (1953) considered that people of the same level enjoy equal social reputation and social status.

In 1990s, contemporary social stratification theory took this kind of research into a new era. Bourdieu (1987) suggested that classes had been constructed by material resources

and symbolic resources, dividing social resources into economic, cultural and social capital. Post-Durkheimists such as Grusky (2001) hold that the occupation levels had been more structured and proposed the model of micro-class analysis.

Overall, scholars used the occupation of resources as the most important indicator for power construction that results in social stratification. Some theorists have predicted the change of social stratification coming with new technologies, thus bringing new social structure. In the information age, such expectation could be realized, if possible, first in virtual communities (Lu, 2016). It is worth discussing whether classical social stratifications can apply to the age of Web 2.0.

2.1.2.3 Changing Power Dynamics in the Age of Web 2.0

In the age of Web 2.0, the interrelation between producers and audiences is further complicated, bringing changes to the dynamics of power construction. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have suggested, Web 2.0 is a platform whereby content and applications are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion, in which social media are all about sharing and interaction. User activity is considered as central to online social media (De Choudhury, Sundaram & Lin, 2009).

Marshall (2009, p. 86) defined the term “user-subjectivity” as an “experience that can be collectively organized and sold as a coherent commodity” formed by new media via the Internet. For example, it enables users to produce their own stories, connections and social networks, and the success is related to the capacity to produce the sense of self-production (Marshall, 2006). Acknowledging that new media is invasive as an economic model for the

media industry, Marshall considers user-subjectivity to be basic for the success of new media entities and suggests to understand interactivity as the facilitator of expanding social networks (2009, p. 86). The value of expanding social networks is further confirmed as crucial for social media, a subset of new media (Penn, 2016).

Penn (2016) distinguished social media from new media because “one can create new media without being social, but one cannot create social media without also being new media by definition” and thus the focus is different when strategies are centered around new media and social media. Prosumers are highly dependent on social media if they want to stand out to be micro-celebrities, who share their passion, opinion and knowledge and expand the volume of followers in their profiles of social networks (Kasitoko, 2018).

2.1.2.4 Power Construction in Virtual Communities

The idea of virtual communities was first coined by Rheingold (1993) as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace”. Fernback and Thompson considered virtual communities as a set of social relationships created in cyberspace through repeated contact within some boundary (1995). Hagel and Armstrong put emphasis on the source of content in virtual community discussion. They reckoned that information, data and emotion expression were all produced within discussion among virtual community members, which distinguished virtual community from other online information services (1997, p. 53). Reading through the literature, the virtual community in this study has been defined as social aggregations

consisting of content of enough quality/quantity and participator-created interpersonal relations around common interests.

Early research about virtual communities in China mostly focus on the comparison with traditional communities, particularly in geographical features, virtualness and openness. Particularly about the question if there are classes within virtual communities, some scholars suggest that virtual communities are featured as de-hierarchical and de-centralized; the sense of identity is reduced because whether to join a community is totally of voluntariness (Zhang, 2013). Moreover, in virtual communities, the boundaries between classes are blurred, partly because it is difficult to measure the production and occupation of wealth, therefore social stratification researches about virtual communities should take appropriate methods so as to adapt to network society. Some scholars suggest that the critical dimension of network social stratification is the information and knowledge, deriving relevant concepts such as “information power” and “discourse power” (Huang, 2004; Cai, 2007). Researchers found that in real society, people in the middle level hold the majority of network discourse rights (Zhou, 2007; Zhao & Fu, 2010). Fan (2010) concluded that providing information is the key variable in network social stratification, and high quality of information that satisfies community members’ needs and engages them makes the virtual community member stand out.

Huang, Feng and Qu (2014) put it more specific that on the micro-level, information sharing in the virtual community helps individual to build a sense of identity; on the meso-level, information sharing is motivated by reciprocity mechanism within virtual

community; on the macro-level, the “fluidity” of virtual communities appreciates sharing and participation in the age of Web 2.0, fostering the users to participate in the carnival by satisfying their desire of individual expression and sympathy within community (Huang et al., 2014; Huang & Yin, 2014).

Despite the general de-centralization feature of virtual communities, some scholars argue that although there is a sense of democracy in most virtual communities, after all the heterogeneity among community members results in stratification, which is universal in any and all societies, including virtual ones (Lu, 2016). Particularly regarding this study, Weibo, as a virtual community, has become more of an actual one with the implementation of real-name registration system in 2017, thus it is necessary to combine the classic social stratification studies and knowledge about virtual communities to analyze Weibo cases.

2.2 Content Creation of Individuals and Organizations

In this section, I review literature about content creation of individuals and teams/organizations on the Internet. It is important to review the move of content creators’ practice and production because the literature indicates the challenges that individual content creators have faced and what kind of assistance they need to improve their performance, which help identify the changes MCNs bring to individual content creators that influence the power they own. Also, knowing the individual content creators’ demands is helpful in establishing measurement objectives of MCNs’ success in terms of assisting individual prosumers.

2.2.1 User-Generated Content and Professionally-Generated Content

With advancing media technologies, access barriers to content creation have been lowered and more individual content consumers have become prosumers (Ritzer et al., 2012). At first stage, the products of prosumers are amateur user-generated content (UGC) of different uncontrolled quality. By publishing UGC, non-media professionals are possible to attract followers thus becoming ‘YouTube stars’ (Burgess & Green, 2013; Kim, 2012). The challenge for prosumers is central in the content industry. Yang pointed out the similarity between culture industry and short videos as part of the content industry that attention to the industry has exceeded the capability of continuous content production, which set thresholds for new comers (Han, 2017). Some amateur content creators can professionalize once they have attracted a considerable group of subscribers (Kim, 2012).

Research on PGC have mainly focused on participatory journalism practices (Domingo et al., 2008; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Herminda & Thurman, 2008). Particularly on non-journalism professionally-generated content (PGC), with the development of mobile devices, the popularity of Internet and enhancing price of intellectual property, some UGC improves toward professional level, namely PGC including network television series and microfilms. PGC prosumers are teams consisting of multiple jobs, such as copywriter, editor and actor.

PGC is welcome by open video platforms and social websites for its ability to attract audience and generate user adherence by providing content to those websites (Yu, 2015). Dahlberg (2015) stated that with strategic win-win partnerships being established between social media platforms like YouTube and professional media content creators, PGC is

increasingly distributed and promoted on these platforms, resulting in the privileging of PGC over UGC. Different from traditional purchase, those websites no more pay for the copyright; instead, they share the ads revenue with the PGC teams in proportion (Changgengxiaobao, 2015).

Despite such booming, For PGC teams, although they have been an improved version of UGC prosumers, only a few can earn money from their products. According to iTime research, in 2017, up to 47.9% of PGC teams did not make profit, most of which profit from platform allowance (Wu, 2018). Among those who fail in realization, major problems include lack of brand-building, poor marketing skills, poor content quality and unclear sub-field segmentation (TechWeb, 2018).

2.2.2 The Evolution of Prosumers

As in the 21st century consumer marketplace, audiences are empowered to receive and share messages, connect with others and collaborate to create content, the social media ecosystem becomes a sphere of influence, centering on the consumer experience (Hanna & Crittenden, 2011). Media consumers of social networking platforms like YouTube and Wikipedia have become producers, or “prosumers” (Toffler & Toffler, 1981) that consume the goods and services they produce. This concept had been implied earlier in Karl Marx’s works about digital labour and firstly coined by Alvin Toffler (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012) indicating “the rise of prosumer”, but it didn’t become “hot” until the 21st century when Toffler and Toffler saw the “coming prosumer explosion” and Ritzer et al. (2012) name it “the age of prosumer”. Related ideas such as “value co-creation” (Humphreys &

Grayson, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2002, 2004a, 2004b), “productive consumption” (Laughey, 2010) and “wikinomics” (Tapscott & Williams, 2006) start booming as well.

The concept of “prosumer” (Toffler, 1980) is in accordance with that of social media labour, referring to those who produce some of their goods and services entering their own consumption. Digital labour has replaced factory labour with the move from Industrial Age to Information Age, and multiple authors have applied Marxist theory, which argues about the class struggle between the minority and the working-class majority, to the new situation (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013). In the Web 2.0 age, social media has developed as a platform for people to create and share information over the Internet, which are typically associated with leisure and entertainment, thus the monetization of digital labour has blurred the boundaries between work and entertainment.

Proponents argue that exploitation occurs as typical social media users do not receive any monetary compensation for their digital content, while companies are able to take advantage of this freely accessible information to generate revenues (Rey, 2012). In practice, companies find it difficult to charge from consumers for their products. Instead, they focus on the creation of effective products and services, that is, the products of prosumers. For example, companies like Youtube and Wikipedia cannot charge their users for access but take advantage of infinite inputs of prosumers (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Indeed, it is not accurate to describe all prosumers as absolutely “unpaid”. Traditional prosumers, as Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) stated, can be rewarded in three ways: 1) being empowered to present themselves in any ways; 2) building and maintaining contact with

others; 3) taking advantage of recognition in a certain field gained from social media presumption to make profit via other channels.

While Humphreys and Grayson (2008) argue that prosumers as “temporary employees” do not indicate a radical change in capitalism, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) hold that the business model around unpaid prosumers can lead to a new form of capitalism, in which labour is not paid financially and directly, products are offered at no cost, and companies no more exert great control over the content of the products.

Different from the time of Karl Marx’s statement of digital labour, prosumers in the 21st century are paid, though not directly (Anderson, 2009). Advertisers are willing to pay for prosumers’ work as the sophisticated algorithm allows for targeting specific interest groups (Zwick & Knott, 2009).

2.2.3 Opinion Leaders and Micro-celebrities

The two-step flow theory of communication explained how voters thought and behaved during an election campaign, suggesting that influence about vote choice flew from the mass media to opinion leaders and then from opinion leaders to the public (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968). Katz and Lazarsfeld’s findings further highlighted interpersonal networks of communication (2017). Such opinion leaders function in virtual communities as well. Usually known as KOLs (key opinion leaders), they are the center of a virtual community, whose existence have proved the differentiation of the members. Liu (2011) generalized four types of opinion leaders in social media: 1) the information home-port; 2) the information interpreter; 3) the information filter; 4) the information transmitter.

Except for those who have already known as celebrities in real society, Li (2011) placed Weibo opinion leaders as information interpreter and transmitter, while Wang (2014) considered opinion leaders on Zhihu as more of information home-pot.

Although some former works such as Gulamali and Persson's study have distinguished micro-celebrities from opinion leaders (2017), in China, these two concepts are partly overlapping. Seeing from recruitment notices of multi-channel networks (MCN), they try to recruit performers to develop into KOLs, who are more known as micro-celebrities. Micro-celebrities, according to Senft, can be understood as a magnifier that "involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using techniques like video, blogs, and social networking sites" (2008, p. 25). According to Marwick (2010), Twitter celebrities with 100,000+ followers, suggested that they imagined their audience as a community that can be connected and managed more than friends.

The model of the audience is complicated today. The broadcast model has been replaced by active audience theory, which maintains that the meaning of a media text is not passively consumed but can be negotiated by the audience; audiences interpret the media content and make meaning from media with their own knowledge structure (Marwick, 2010). Corresponding to discussion about prosumer, which is discussed in the following sections, the idea of the "audience" has been understood as the "interpretive community" and "participatory culture", assuming "small, active, and highly engaged groups of people who don't consume content but produce their own as well" (Marwick, 2010).

2.2.4 The Age of MCNs

In 2016, great changes took place in Chinese network industry. More netizens are prone to acquire information from mobile devices and network traffic flows to short videos, which can be shot and edited easily on mobile applications similar to Viddy and Vine and shared on social media platforms in real time. Many PGC teams decided to deprogramatize their products into short videos of 2 or 3 minutes, which seem to take the form of UGC rather than PGC. Fei Liu, head of video team “Hexiangufu(何仙姑夫)”, made it clear that they were not repeat what they had done before, but marching toward the blue sea of multi-channel networks (MCN) (NetEase Shuangchuang, 2018).

With the advent of YouTube era, MCN emerged as a talent agency help transfer UGC or PGC prosumers as Mills stated:

Multi-channel networks tap into specific markets, gamers, teens, etc., and generate fan bases for “creators” – the people making videos. MCNs make money by selling ads that run before their videos, and most of their talent makes money from YouTube directly and from the advertisers who run content before their videos (Gardner & Lehnert, 2016, p. 295).

For PGC or UGC prosumers, MCN is considered a solution for those who would find it difficult to develop into top level simply on its own. Content creation usually take so much time that leaving little time for individual prosumers to networking and marketing; plus, creative ideas are everywhere but seldom produce long-lasting effect (Rubing, 2018). By joining an MCN, individual prosumers are able to acquire support of professional content planning, mutual promotion, cooperation management, digital copyright management capital or other resources thus transferring into PGC or intellectual property

(IP) (Huayang, 2017; Sohu, 2017; Xu, 2018). Most MCNs endeavor to commercialize their top-level partner prosumers into celebrities that have more sources of income (Rubing, 2018). Individual prosumers within MCN are still independent content creators. For MCNs, they sign on content creators and share ads revenue with them, normally on a thirty-seventy ratio.

Also, MCNs are more appreciated than individual prosumers when bargaining with video platforms and are likely to acquire more promoting resources (Xu, 2017). On one hand, MCNs drive to higher content quality thus increasing user loyalty; on the other hand, open platforms need agents to assist in content supervision (Xu, 2017). For instance, NetEase provides MCNs with content management, member management, income management and data analysis services to help enhance content operation efficiency. Additional services like open resource management, web push, public opinion monitoring and interest point analysis are provided on condition of policy. It is reported that NetEase will soon establish an MCN growth system, which is expected to bring more convenience and resources to MCNs (NetEase, 2017).

In China, there are two trends of MCNs. If an MCN simply functions as intermediary between clients and prosumers, the values it can create are very limited. If an MCN participates in content production, hopefully it will end up as a “star maker”; in this case, not only available resources but sustained productivity will become major challenges (Rubing, 2018). Until 2017, not many MCNs have functioned effectively, which has resulted in negative impact on their partner prosumers’ development (Rubing, 2018).

As discussed above, major values of MCN model are identified that it helps in audience building by pooling and sharing and it provides support and guidance to partner content creators (Gardner and Lehnert, 2016). Measurement objectives of MCNs' success should be established in accordance with these major values.

2.2.5 The Trend of Prosumer Production: Short Videos

It is important to note that MCNs' service is only available to vloggers, that is, content creators who produce and share user-generated short videos (Molyneaux, O'Donnell, Gibson & Singer, 2008). There is no agreed standard definition for short videos to date. According to SocialBeta.com (2013), short videos are a few seconds long, which can be shot and edited easily on mobile intelligent terminal and shared on social media platforms in real time.

Short video applications were first developed in the United States, where Viddy and Vine were released respectively in 2011 and 2013. Connected with major social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, these short video applications are born with strong social attributes (Yan, 2016). In China, various short video applications featuring multiple preferences have emerged since 2013, among which major ones include Miaopai, Meipai and Weishi are in close cooperation with social media platforms like Weibo and QQ (Wang, Bao & Lv, 2015; Yan, 2016). Analyzing these applications and user-generated short videos, researchers found that the amateur-level editing function, easy access to major social media platforms, visual impressiveness and efficiency together contribute to its popularity (Wang, Bao & Lv, 2015; Zhao & Wang, 2015; Yan, 2016).

Few studies have suggested metrics to track how successful a short video's performance is. Though not particularly defined in terms of short videos, Skeleton, a company working on video marketing, has drawn a set of metrics including view count, play rate, engagement, social sharing, click-through rate, conversation rate and feedback (2016). By drawing on media needs theory, Yang et al. (2017) analyzed factors affecting users' reposting intention in Weibo usage including the content of information, users' emotions and relationship between users, results indicating that the reposting intention can be intrigued by funny, novel and informative content as well as unidirectional relationship.

It is not easy for grassroot content creators to produce short videos to cover these indicators intentionally. Wang et al. (2015) indicated that though both Weishi and Miaopai were initially positioned as PGC-dominated and UGC-supplemented, the truth is that most uploaded videos are rough UGC while professionally-generated videos fail to meet market demands in both quantity and quality. In conclusion, it is inferred that MCNs may function to fill the gap between UGC and PGC.

2.3 Measurement Objectives of MCNs' Performances

In order to draw measurement objectives, key outcomes of the specific ecosystem and related metrics should be identified (Hanna & Crittenden, 2011). Particularly regarding MCNs, they are located in social media environment, function in short video production with member content creators and conduct marketing activities with various partners, thus literature about the developing media environment, social stratification and communication in virtual communities, the evolution and practice of prosumers are referred to deal with

each dimension respectively.

As a result, the literature suggests that measurement objectives of MCNs' performances can be interpreted as 1) user subjectivity – content creators' subjectivity to generate content; 2) the quality and amount of information sharing in the short videos – the support in content production; 3) the structure of this virtual community – the personnel composition of an MCN; 4) the relationship between an MCN and its member content creators; 5) the ability of enhancing audience engagement, and 6) the public relations outreach capacity.

2.4 The Case of Papi and Papitube

The MCN model in China started 3 years after it was first adopted by YouTube in 2013. The path of MCNs in Chinese context is questioned for being more of PGC teams rather than MCNs. Critiques indicate that the major difference between PGC and MCN is that the former lacks high-quality intellectual property which is indispensable for the latter (Dongdongbiji, 2017).

In this sense, Papitube remains to be a “real MCN”, which was launched by “China’s No.1 vlogger” Papi in November 2016 (BlueFocus Communication Group, 2017). Papi’s self-mockery labelling as “poor and flat” was unique among female influencers who are typically seen with small v-face and flaunt wealth thus making her famous at the beginning of 2016. As announced in March 2016, her channel received RMB 12 million in financing from four domestic venture funds – ZhenFund, Luogic Show, Lighthouse Capital and Xingtuo Capital (Xiang, 2016). A major part of the venture funds retrieved in November

2016, Papi and her team realized that it would be risk if they solely depended on Papi and started Papitube plan to recruit more content creators and make it a “creative, interesting and morally inspiring video content platform” as Papi described in the job posting in 2016. Papitube represents the MCN model headed with a hot intellectual property (IP) that incubating secondary content creators, which enhances the “ability to bargain with advertisers” (Nie, as cited in Mediaplus, 2017).

Still, Papitube’s MCN model is problematic for visible lack of capability to maintain audiences’ interest, though Yang, Papitube’s CEO, considers such cooling-down as helping enhance the value of Papitubers by only retaining fans with loyalty (Han, 2017). This is partly because of the complex industrial environment in China, which aggravates the workload of MCNs in Chinese context (Zhang, 2017).

In conclusion, changes in the power ownership of individual content creators are vital indicators of an MCN’s performance. To evaluate such changes is to evaluate if an MCN makes up to generate or increase prosumer value for both ends of the digital labour, namely the content creators and their audience, which is the key to success in the age of prosumers. Strategies are made and evaluated by the quality of assistance that an MCN provides to empower member content creators and the capability of maintaining relationship with audiences. The past work has looked at prosumer content creation of individuals and professional teams, but it remains unexplained why MCNs are extraordinarily popular and how individual content creation is changed with professional organizations entering this field. Given this body of research, this study seeks to address the following research

questions:

RQ1: What mechanisms of MCNs allow content creators to benefit in achieving social media success compared with individual work?

RQ2: What aspects of content creation have changed given movement from individual to MCNs?

By asking these questions, this study summarizes stated values of Papitube in existing documents and analyzes changes in content creation of prosumers through a content analysis of Papitube members' social media performance with and without an MCN so as to identify the values of MCNs in Chinese social media market. Looking into current MCNs' advantages, mechanism and its effects, this study helps individual content creators decide whether joining an MCN is a good choice and provides evidences for MCNs that can contribute to improvement.

Chapter 3 Methodology

To address what the changes in content creation are with the move from individual to MCN, this study involves a descriptive case study of Papitube and its partners that typically represent this transition. With a qualitative document analysis of news stories about Papitube, official notices published by Papitube and other relevant information about Papitube shared on Q&A forums, what has been claimed as Papitube's value is discussed. Following the document analysis, a qualitative content analysis is conducted to verify the stated values and evaluate the effects of MCNs' strategies.

Case studies have been largely used by scholars to understand complex social phenomena. Yin (1994) stated that case studies are typically driven by “why” and “how” questions and must have five components: research questions, theoretical propositions, units of analysis, the logic that links the data to the propositions and criteria to interpret the findings. As Yin concluded, generalization results from case studies should stand on theory rather than populations. It is expected to catch the complexity of a single case (Stake, 1995).

In this study, a qualitative case study is ideal to apply as it provides opportunity to use multiple information sources to explore an MCN’s operation. Choosing Papitube as the subject of this case study, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the document analysis method and the content analysis method, which will be followed by a more detailed discussion of the strengths, weaknesses and rationale for selecting these research methods of this study. Finally, procedures including data collection, research tools and coding framework to analyze data from Papitube-related documentations and Papitubers’ Weibo pages will be discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Document Analysis

Though in most social scientific work, documents have been placed at the margin of consideration, “the modern world is made through writing and documentation” (Prior, 2003). Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted to give meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). In terms of the number of documents to gather, quality is more important than quantity (Bowen, 2009). Scholars have suggested that documents are analyzed only if they seem authentic and

credible, free from error because documents collected in a research are interpreted as socially situated products, produced and intended to be read, seen or heard within a particular social context (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). As such, in this study, three types of documents (Papitube-related news stories, official notices and information shared on Q&A forums) were interpreted according to their setting, context and situation in which they were disseminated, interpreted or ultimately consumed/viewed/read. Except for the original purpose of the document, such as the target audience, latent content such as the style, tone, facts or whether the document was solicited, edited, and/or anonymous, should also be kept in mind (Bowen, 2009; O’Leary, 2014).

The three types of data resources in this study varied in publisher’s identity, targeted audience and credibility. For instance, both traditional and technological factors could influence the credibility of online news. Traditional factors such as journalists’ professional role conception as interpretive, disseminator, adversarial or populist mobilizer, would exert influence of varied degree on online news credibility (Cassidy, 2007). Those different roles suggest the possibility that news stories’ authenticity can be influenced by both interviewees’ intent and journalists’ subjectivity. Technological factors also play an important role on online news credibility. The use of hypertext links, news publisher reliability ranking, and availability of additional information largely influence credibility perceptions (Chung, Nam & Stefanone, 2012).

Caulley (1983, p. 23) offers a few general rules for selecting appropriate documents:

- Choose the document that is closer to the event described as incomplete

observation and faulty memory can result in inadequacy of testimony.

- The more serious the writer's intention to make a mere record, the more dependable the document.
- The testimony of a schooled or experienced observer and reporter is generally superior to that of the untrained and casual observer and reporter.

Regarding the rules above, the authenticity of documents is an important indicator in the preliminary selection of documents in this study. For example, documents collected from direct sources is rated of higher authenticity than those from indirect sources; real-name documents are more credible than anonymous or net-name ones. Examining information collected from different sources can reduce the impact of potential bias. Documents are manageable and practical resources of data in various forms and can be reviewed multiple times, this kind of data is not only easy to obtain so that saving time and cost, but are stable in the research process (Bowen, 2009, p.31).

Before analyzing, a detailed planning process should take place in order to ensure reliability, following 8 steps from creating a list of texts to explore to considering ethical issue (O'Leary, 2014). Then comes the major procedure, including finding, selecting, appraising and synthesizing documentary data by coding and category construction (Bowen, 2009). Through a document analysis, this study will analyze the way that Papitube operates in by looking into relevant news, official documents and other information shared on Q&A forums.

3.1.1 Data Collection

Data collection, whether in interview, observation, or document analysis, is guided by questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, given the research questions asking about MCNs' value and its operating effects, the main resources of data being collected and analyzed in this study are:

(1) News about Papitube during April 21, 2016 to December 31, 2017 (The posts were collected during this time frame because the plan of Papitube was published on April 21, 2016 and this study began in December, 2017).

By searching “Papitube” through Baidu, the most popular search engine in mainland China, there was a total of 306 records in the news column. All the 306 pieces of news were categorized by title, date, author, significance (relevance to Papitube, level 1 to 5) and authenticity (considering direct or indirect source, original or reproduction; for example, if the name of author is not available, the authenticity of this piece of news would be affected, which is, for convenience, represented by reducing to a lower level in significance), title, date, and author. Using other newspapers as a source of news and republishing a story which first appeared elsewhere as a custom widely recognized (Rowland, 2003), 18 records were found overlapping with other collected news, thus the news story of higher significance were retained. For instance, both titled with “Papi 酱团队:罗辑思维原价退出投资 一直很感谢罗振宇 [Papi's Team Expressed Gratitude to LJSW, though Finance was Retrieved]”, the news story on thepaper.cn had been published under the name Xinyu Liu while the other had been published anonymously on money.163.com, thus the

former was evaluated as more credible to be retained.

In total, three records have been ranked as level 4 and 5 (see Appendix A). Since effective data is limited, all 29 records were analyzed in detail without sampling.

(2) Official notices published by Papitube until December 31, 2017.

This type of documents was helpful as the official notices published by Papitube represented its needs and concerns directly and authentically. This type of documents was helpful as it was the only data source providing Papitube representing the Papitube has posted five recruitment notices since it was established, including three on Weibo and two on WeChat public account. The recruitment notices were the only official document that Papitube had ever published on social media platforms. In addition to that, public speech given by Papitube's CEO and CCO published on newspapers or news websites were also accounted as official documents since every word had been copied down. In total, there were three speeches recorded, which had been recorded in the news articles and were discussed in the former category.

(3) Other information shared on Q&A forums

Web communities are human knowledge and society in hyperlinked form on the web, information on which is made available by millions of different individuals with a variety of backgrounds (Flake, Lawrence, Giles & Coetzee, 2002). This type of documents were collected from Weibo Q&A and Zhihu, the most popular Q&A forum in China. On Weibo Q&A, Papitube's official account answered a question about what Papi was like when she was not recording the videos; 2 Papitubers shared their

experience about their content production, social media operation and how they had joined Papitube. On Zhihu, an answerer shared his/her work experience with Papi, who is also one of the Papitubers.

3.1.2 Data Analysis

This study draws on multiple sources of data and in this section mainly utilizes qualitative document analysis to examine the findings. Although this study's focus is on MCNs' value to content creators, typically the organization's strategies, or their claimed advantages are associated with or connected in some way to the reason why individual content creators regard MCNs as valuable. Combining MCNs' characters of both a marketing organization and a short video studio, I organized and coded the data as it related to the 5 major categories (or dimensions) of my conceptual framework: organizational structure, marketing, content support, vision/mission, and effects.

Considering the collected data, especially data collected from news articles, may consisted of multiple questions and answers in various aspects within an interview, I used 图悦(Picdata) to analyze the word frequency to draw the major themes of the news articles which were in large part relevant to the major concerns of Papitube. 图悦(Picdata) is a word frequency analysis tool based on UCINET software, which retrieves single words from selected sample texts, calculate word frequency and ranks the results in a picture or a table. It helps researchers to read the key points, hot topics and trends quickly and conveniently (Zhang & Wang, 2014). Meanwhile, I utilized analytic memo writing, including "future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis,

insightful connections, and anything about the researched and the researcher” (Saldana, 2015, p. 32-33) to search for patterns and themes in place of applying fragmentary paragraphs as coding units. As Charmaz states, memos are helpful in catching thoughts, capturing comparisons and connections, thus making the questions and direction clear to pursue; Particularly, Charmaz mentions that memo writing helps to “fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering” (2006, p. 72). At this point, memos also provide ground for following content analysis.

Through the document analysis, RQ1 is partly answered by the information about Papitube’s advantages, work model and strategies collected and sorted out from the news articles, official notices and shared information on Q&A forums. The answer needs to be further confirmed with the content analysis of Papitubers’ Weibo posts which reveal their actual performances.

3.2 Content Analysis

Following the completion of document analysis, a content analysis was then implemented. The document analysis was used in the first phase to help retrieve information from the documents and to examine what characteristics of MCN across documents were most valued. Based on that, a content analysis of Papituber’s Weibo posts was used to verify and complete those valued characteristics.

Content analysis is often used in mass media research (Lombard, Snyder-duch & Bracken, 2002). It is defined as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). It

may be used in an inductive or deductive way. If there is not enough former knowledge about the phenomenon or if this knowledge is fragmented, the specific-general inductive approach is recommended (Lauri & Kynga's 2005), while the deductive approach is used the purpose of the study is theory testing (Kynga's & Vanhanen 1999). Mayring (2014) stated that the objectives of qualitative content analysis are to identify major themes, key messages and main ideas in existing reports. Traditional content analysis entails steps from selecting topic, sampling, to coding and analyzing (Mayring, 2014; Lai & To, 2015). Particularly in social media webpage content analysis, many studies have been conducted in terms of engagement activities (Zoha, Kumaran, Hasmah & Mohd Hairul Nizam, 2016). In terms of steps, first, content needs to be compressed into fewer predetermined content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Stemer, 2001; Bryman, 2004).

Both document analysis and content analysis allowed me to answer the research questions about MCNs' value and comparison between content creators' social media performance before- and after-MCN.

3.2.1 Data Collection

In this study, Papituber-created content including texts, pictures and videos, and audiences' likes, comments and shares on Weibo were examined. The first step was to create a list of Papitubers and take a sample. In preliminary research, no consistent list of Papitube members was available. The most recent list was released by Huo, Papitube's COO, in her public speech in January 2018. Though the list was imperfect with only 16 names, nearly half the number they had presented in former interviews, it allowed for

effective sampling. It is important that Papitubers included in the sample be active. As such a sampling frame was constructed by examining these 16 accounts over a 1-month period both before and after the Papituber joined Papitube. While the after-MCN sample posts were drawn from December 2017, the month before the list was published, for all 16 Papitubers on the list, the before-MCN month, or “-1 month”, varied for individual. In addition, “-1 month” was not available for some accounts on the list, such as @Papitube and @Papi 家的大小咪, in that they were created after Papitube had been launched. Besides, Papi was added to the list as the top of Papitubers. In total, 15 Weibo accounts as initial sample were still too much to analyze, then six Papitubers were to select from the list to compare their performances. To ensure the sample’s objectiveness and comprehensiveness, I have employed stratified sampling, randomly selecting Papitubers based on the volume of their followers, which labels their popularity or influence within Weibo community.

A sample of posts were drawn from all sample Papitubers’ before- and after-MCN content, depending on the time when the content creator joined Papitube. Since such information is seldom available, I have referred to Papitube’s official Weibo account to see when it for the first time mentioned a content creator, which marked the official recognition of a Papituber, then I collected data one month before as before-MCN content. In data collection, I chose the earlier time between the two. As for after-MCN content, I retrieved data one month before the list of Papitubers had been published, that is, December 2017. For example, Papitube had firstly shared @Acui 阿崔’s post on July 14, 2016, then the

data of June 2016 was collected as before-MCN content. In total, 133 pieces of after-MCN content and 122 pieces of before-MCN content were analyzed by the researcher according to a coding schedule (see in Figure 1).

Papitubers	Followers	Before-MCN		After-MCN	
		Sampling Month	Post Frequency	Sampling Month	Post Frequency
@Papi 酱 [Papi]	27595931	2016.3	7	2017.12	16
@Acui 阿崔 [Acui]	1254154	2016.6	12	2017.12	16
@赖赖是 Zoe [Zoe]	1043661	2016.8	69	2017.12	45
@诸葛龔龔 [Nangnang]	587061	2016.7	2	2017.12	19
@王咩阿 [Miea]	294913	2016.9	2	2017.12	18
@夏小雨 Keira [Keira]	140018	2017.5	30	2017.12	19

Figure 1 Basic Information about Sample (Retrieved on Jan 8, 2018)

3.2.2 Data Analysis

A deductive approach was used to analyze both before- and after-MCN content. Since the work of Papitube and its members was to be measured in dimensions of marketing and media content producing, to develop a categorization matrix and code the data accordingly, I referred to Maaisi Li's study of Papi's video content production, communication and profit model (2017) and Xiaotong Li's study of the communication strategies of Yitiao Video, an influential PGC team in China (2017). A coding scheme was developed with the aim of extracting and recording the key emergent themes relating to how the audience reacted to different content in each post and what element of the post induced the audience

to do so, involving five primary categories: update routine, video content (e.g., slogan, topic, audio), video editing (e.g., music, subtitles), promotion (e.g., advertisement, giveaways, hashtags), and audience engagement (e.g., likes, comments, reposts). Among the 5 categories, the first three were analyzed to find the changes in content production; elements about promotion pointed to the new business opportunities and relationships between content creators within one MCN; audience engagement was analyzed to testify if these strategies really had made a difference. The objective of the qualitative content analysis portion of the study, then, was 1) to further confirm and supplement the stated work model and strategies for social media success that were drawn from the document analysis to answer **RQ1**, and 2) to identify what aspects of content creation had changed as MCN stepped in thus answering **RQ2** (see in Figure 2).

Top-level categories	Sub-categories
Update Routine	1. Updating Short videos
Video Content	2. Videos with a slogan 3. Videos belonging to a fixed topic area 4. Use of corresponding period sound 5. Use of using voiceover 6. Exaggerated performance
Video Editing	7. Videos accelerated 8. Use of background music 9. Use of subtitles 10. Quick cutaways
Promotion	11. Advertisement 12. Using giveaways 13. Promoting other Papitubers 14. Cooperation with brands 15. Use of topic-related hashtags 16. Use of individual hashtags

Audience Engagement of Short Videos	17. Primarily about the topic 18. Primarily about giveaways
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Figure 2 Coding Scheme of Papitubers' Weibo Posts

As a result, 18 sub-categories were created in this study. Some codes summarized the content of the video post, some codes pointed out the main purpose of the posts, for example, encouraging the audience to forward their posts.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Findings of Document Analysis

In this document analysis, I was looking for the advantages that Papitube had claimed to provide Papitubers and information about Papitube's operation model. These pieces of evidence contribute to answering **RQ1** – what mechanisms of MCNs allow content creators to benefit in achieving social media success compared with individual work? Since the three sources of data had varied a lot in sample size and formats, each source was analyzed, and is reported, in detail independently. Next, the results of all the data are compared and synthesized, sorting out evidences of Papitube's services in content production, talent training and social media marketing that provide answers to **RQ1**.

4.1.1 Document Analysis of News Articles

29 news articles (numbered and listed in Appendix A) were analyzed with 图悦 (Picdata) to calculate the frequency and frequency weight of words in these documents. Leaving alone meaningless words, frequency weight stood out as the primary indicator of

importance. Among the top 100 words ranking by weight, 55% (f=829) presented information about operation, followed by content-related words (15%, f=197), others (14%, f=134), personnel-related words (9%, f=97) and capital-related words (7%, f=82). Seen from the data, information about Papitube's work model and marketing strategies is mostly asked and answered in Papitube's interviews. In this way, Papitube focuses more on operation and marketing than content production and its major values are supposed to lie in the former.

To further analyze operation-related words, three topics were concluded as follows: 1) solutions (38 words, 69.09%); 2) Papituber-related (12 words, 21.82%), and 3) audience-related (5 words, 9.09%). Back to the news stories, Papitube's vision and mission were mostly described as "to foster content creators into micro-celebrities" (news articles 3, 19, 23, 27 and 28). News articles 7 and 18 emphasized the reason of fostering more content creators was to ensure the ability to generate content continuously, which was a challenge for any individual content creator. News article 27 adopted another perspective that both interests and risks dilute with more content creators. The news article published on Tencent Fashion also raised the concept of "we-media matrix", indicating that Papitubers in some cases would work together.

Despite the possibility to work as an entity, news articles 1, 8, 21 and 23 indicated that Papitubers generated content individually in what they were adept with. News article 1 found that at the first stage Papitube's content had been collected from contributors that were attracted by Papi's call for video contribution; almost all the contributed videos

copied Papi's video pattern, which didn't seem to be what Papitube had wanted. In 2017, it was emphasized in the news articles that Papitube didn't aim to mass-produce "Papis"; instead, Papitubers would develop their own inspiration, while Papi, or other professional personnel of Papitube would function as supervisor, giving advice on topic selection, shooting and editing (news articles 2, 6 and 8). This was also recognized by Huo, Papitube's chief operating officer (COO), who stated in her public speech that they would provide a tool kit to Papitubers, from which Papitubers could learn the basics of topic selecting, script writing and video editing according to their interested topic areas and individual characteristics; if the Papituber were encountered with decline in popularity, or difficulty in attracting more followers, the production team would analyze the reasons and make adjustments according to the Papituber's personal characteristics. For example, Acui had been optimized by adjusting her position to have more reasonable topics to develop, building a more vivid figure with a slogan, and change the post-production; those efforts resulted in quadrupled audience engagement within 2 months (news article 16).

As mentioned in news articles 7 and 18, the ability to generate content continuously had been challenging, which could have impact on content creators' survival. By joining Papitube, content creators could gain higher or at least more stable income by sharing revenue with Papitube according to their contracts (news article 7). According to Yang, ad revenue, E-business and paid interaction in live streaming would together consist of Papitubers' income (news articles 7 and 19). Top prosumers would have even more choices in terms of source of income. Papi, as the top prosumer in Papitube, gained revenue by

attending Advertisement Festival, ad auction, and other activities that only a real celebrity might attend (news articles 2 and 22). This is exactly what was described by Yang the ultimate goal of Papi (news articles 9, 21 and 22). Though for other Papitubers, it remained uncertain if the way of celebritization also worked for them. As Yang suggested, the audience might see Papitubers' works not only on social media, but in movie theatres (Han, 2017).

In terms of promotion, 4 news articles (12.9%) have mentioned that Papi, as the top of Papitubers, shared other Papitubers' production on her Weibo and Wechat public account so as to pull a crowd, showing a "head-support-bottom" principal (news articles 4, 6, 10 and 16). Other ways of promotion include: 1) inviting Papitubers to Papi's live streaming, videos and activities in other web communities (news articles 4, 10 and 12); and 2) providing opportunities for Papitubers to appear in off-line activities by cooperating with companies or NGOs (news articles 9 and 20).

Besides operating solutions, 4 pieces of news centered around the involvement of capital. It was indicated that as a community, Papitube had been easier to acquire capital support, which was a double-edge sword, as risks and intervention also multiplied (news articles 2, 23 and 28). The author detailed in news article 2 that capital might not affect individual content creators much, though it was important for MCNs because mass video production was costly. With capital intervening, video production might be required to accelerate or to include more business elements. In order to diminish such influence, the executives decided to depend on the parent company to hold Papitube.

In summary, individual content creators benefited from Papitube in enhancing ability of producing content continuously, ready-made tool kits to improve the quality of their videos, gaining more work opportunities and income, and getting promoted by Papi. Despite these valuable advantages, they would be more vulnerable to the intervention of investors.

4.2.2 Document Analysis of Official Notices

Papitube's recruitment notices provided direct evidence about its organizational structure, which implied its different work model compared with individual works. These recruitment notices were published over time and different types of talents were wanted. Two notices published on WeChat and 5 on Weibo, most of which were released by Papitube's official account, except 1 on Weibo was posted by Papi.

Comparing the requirements in the recruitment notices, 4 of them aimed to recruit the behind-the-scene crew. In 2016, it was the production team most wanted, such as script writers, post-production staff and graphic designers.

Operation staff was first mentioned in August 2016, including social media coordinator and e-commerce marketing specialist. In 2017, the call for social media staff was listed in the first place in both notices (see in Figure 3).

No.	Date	Author	Form	Source	Jobs wanted
1	2016.04.25	Papitube	video	WeChat	Performers, post-production, script writer
2	2016.04.28	Papi	video	Weibo	Performers, post-production, script writer

3	2016.08.30	Papitube	Poster	Weibo	Creative planner, graphic design, social media coordinator, e-commerce marketing specialist
4	2016.11.29	Papitube	Video	Weibo	Content creators in various subjects
5	2016.11.29	Papitube	Video	WeChat	Content creators in various subjects
6	2017.06.14	Papitube	Poster	Weibo	Social media director, social media coordinator, script writer, creative planner
7	2017.09.01	Papitube	Poster	Weibo	Social media coordinator, producer, script writer (punster)

Figure 3 Coding Frame of Official Notices

Video producers, or performers (in comparison with the behind-the-scene staff) were recruited twice, each with a recruitment video. The first video was published in April 2016, immediately after Papi had announced the launch of Papitube, which was performed by Papi alone. Multiple talents were called for in this video and there were no explicit or detailed requirements of candidates' qualifications in the video or description text. Candidates could apply to join Papitube by sending their resume and videos to Papitube's email.

In contrast, the second video published in November 2016, included several Papitubers. It seemed to be shot with candid cameras, recording a real brain storm among Papitubers which showed their work routine like a documentary. Not only should the candidates submit their videos via email, but upload the videos to Weibo with a designated hashtag #Papitube 来搞#. In this notice, it was made clear that candidates should have special knowledge or skills in a certain subject whatever it was. The emphasis on the diversity of talents was in accordance with what they had claimed to maintain each Papituber's interested topic area and develop a diversified content creator matrix.

Overall, it could be noticed that Papitube's personnel composition allowed for multiple functions. The work of content production was split into more specific activities such as creative planning and script writing. Among those functions, social media marketing was particularly important. Those efforts were beyond individual workload and valuable for making up the deficiency in various aspects of individual content creators' work.

4.2.3 Document Analysis of Experience Shared on Q&A Forums

Among the six personal stories about Papitube-related experience shared on Q&A forums, five were shared by three Papitubers in Weibo Q&A columns, while the other was shared by a behind-the-scene personnel on Zhihu. All the stories were summarized below in Figure 4.

No.	Date	Author	Source	Summary
1	2017.5.14	Papitube	Weibo	How is Papi like in private; Experience of working with Papi
2	2017.3.31	Acui 阿崔	Weibo	Her interest in painting and experience of joining Papitube
3	2017.8.11	Bigger 研究所	Weibo	Reason of engaging in social media, reason of attracting followers
4	2017.3.8		Weibo	How they think of a video topic
5	2017.2.19		Weibo	Educational background, vocation and avocation
6	2017.1.23	躲起来不认识自己	Zhihu	How do Papi and her team work

Figure 4 Coding Frame of Shared Personal Stories

Both Acui and BiggerLab mentioned that their content was developed from personal interests. Papitube and the answerer on Zhihu described how the production staff

brainstormed to generate interesting topics and materials together for Papi’s videos. These answers also indicated that Papi had tried to create a relaxing working environment on purpose to engage each team member to contribute their ideas.

Through the document analysis of news stories, official notices and shared personal experience about Papitube, evidence about Papitube’s services in content production, talent training and social media marketing were found to answer **RQ1**. The claimed advantages – enhancing continuous production, ready-made tool kits to improve videos, easier access to more work opportunities and income, broader promotion channels, and professional social media marketing, were to be confirmed through the following the content analysis.

4.2 Findings of Content Analysis

The findings of the document analysis helped me determine how Papitubers’ short videos were transformed and what effects on audiences were caused. In the content analysis, a coding schedules was developed according to the results for the document analysis, such as: 1) Papitubers were encouraged to develop the core content of their video independently rather than copy Papi’s content; 2) Papitube would provide professional assistance in content planning and video editing; 3) Papitube would assist in marketing, primarily on social media, to help Papitubers get more exposure; 4) Papitubers would produce content consistently; 5) their working environment was relaxing and loosely-structured so as to catalyze more creative ideas. Based on these findings, first, I detailed the sub-categories as below (see in Figure 5).

Categories	Sub-categories	Target	Coding
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			Scheme
Update Routine	1. Frequency of updating short videos	To see if Papitubers produce short videos more frequently	Yes=1; No=0; Not available=NA
Video Content	2. Use of slogan 3. Fixed category of video content 4. Use of corresponding period sound 5. Use of voiceover 6. Exaggerated performance	To examine if Papi's experience in content planning and performing applied to Papitubers	
Video Editing	7. Acceleration 8. Use of background music 9. Use of subtitles 10. Use of quick cutaways	To examine if Papitubers took Papi-like patterns	
Promotion	11. Advertisement in the video 12. Cooperation with brands 13. Cooperation with other Papitubers	To see if individual content creators got more exposure/business opportunities after joining Papitube	
	14. Use of giveaways 15. Use of topic-related hashtags 16. Use of personal hashtags	To see if new marketing strategies were employed	
	17. Topic-related engagement 18. Giveaway-related engagement	To evaluate how audiences react to individual work and MCN production	

Figure 5 Completed Coding Scheme of Papitubers' Weibo Posts

With the sub-categories of before- and after MCN posts analyzed, the answer to **RQ1** drawn from findings of the document analysis was further examined in terms of the accordance between Papitube's implemented tactics and what they had claimed, followed

with evaluation based on the analysis of audience engagement to see if these strategies realized the claimed values of MCN. By analyzing the changes in the pre-determined aspects and the correlation among those categories, the findings would first give answers to **RQ2**.

4.2.1 Update Routine: More Short Videos

Five sample Papitubers (Acui, Zoe, Nangnang, Micia and Keira) posted more short videos during the after-MCN sample month than before; four Papitubers (Acui, Zoe, Nangnang and Keira)' proportion of short videos increased, with average video number growth around 16 per cent. Micia was not calculated herein because he only posted twice during his “-1 month” and the proportion of videos would be 100%. Though he actually published 11 short videos in a total of 18 posts, the proportion of videos decreased, thus failing to represent the overall tendency of changes in update routine.

Seen from the data, Papi posted 4 videos in her “-1 month” and three videos in December 2017. There was no big difference in the number of videos while the proportion of posted videos decreased by 38.3% with more non-video posts and reposts promoting other Papitubers' work.

The difference in update routine changes between Papi and other recruited Papitubers showed different strategies of their directions. Overall, recruited Papitubers produced more videos than before, inferring their enhancing ability to produce videos continuously.

4.2.2 Video Content: Similar Style with Minor Differences

Major changes of before- and after-MCN video content lie use of performer's voice.

Four Papitubers (Papi, Zoe, Nangnang, Mica) primarily used corresponding period sound, which represented that the vlogger directly spoke to the camera rather than adding voiceover, among which Nangnang, Acui and Mica didn't show up in their videos and used voiceover only before joining Papitube. Keira used voiceover only after joining Papitube while she hadn't spoken a word in her former works, which had usually been seconds-long videos.

There were changes in other aspects. 2 Papitubers (Acui, Nangnang) added a slogan in their videos after joining Papitube. 5 Papitubers' videos belonged to the same categories before they joined Papitube. For example, Acui's videos were mostly based on her talents of drawing; Nangnang focused on commenting popular technologies; Zoe and Keira produced videos about makeups. The only exception was Mica, who posted videos about pencil drawing before. His recent works could hardly be described as of a certain fixed category but "funny videos".

In addition, while Zoe and Keira, both of whom were makeup vloggers, used an ordinary tone, the other 4 Papitubers (Papi, Acui, Nangnang, Mica) were found to employ a larger-than-life acting style in their videos. As mentioned above, Acui, Nangnang and Mica didn't shown up in their videos before joining Papitube, so they were not even performing.

Though Papitube had claimed to develop each Papituber's videos independently, a lot of changes in performance and video editing were found in common in Papitubers' videos. These common features of Papitubers' after-MCN videos were actually drawn from Papi's

videos, which formed a tool kit to convert Papitubers' works when necessary. Since the tool kit were not jammed into each Papituber's videos but applied with consideration to fit each of them properly, the Papitubers, as the head of Papitube had claimed, did not look like replicas of Papi.

4.2.3 Video Editing: Similar Editing Style

As for editing pattern, four Papitubers (Papi, Acui, Zoe, Nangnang) tended to speed up their videos after joining Papitube. Not many changes were found in the use of background music and subtitles – they seemed to be essentials as long as the performer spoke in the video. Similarly, the use of quick cutaways was another common trait of Papitubers' videos. Among the sample Papitubers, Keira was the only one who hadn't employ such editing pattern, which was in accordance with her overall soft style.

The use of background, subtitles and cutaways might also be a part of Papitube's tool kit, however, such editing had been popular even before Papitube was launched, therefore content creators could have mimicked Papi's editing style before they joined Papitube. Again, the successful experience of Papi was not applied blindly to each Papituber. There was room for each Papituber to choose the appropriate way to express themselves.

4.2.4 Promotion: More Business Opportunities

By joining Papitube, most of the sample Papitubers got more business opportunities. 5 sample Papituber (Papi, Acui, Zoe, Nangnang and Midea) advertised at least twice in December 2017, while in their “-1 months”, none of them had got a chance to cooperate with a company and engage in business promotion. Among those advertising posts, Papi

was mostly advertising the movie she acted in via non-video posts, while the other four sample Papitubers promoted various products in their videos. Keira, though introduced multiple cosmetics in her videos, both before- and after-MCN ones, was not considered in cooperation with those brands since introducing make-up products was an inevitable step in any make-up video and there were no signals of business cooperation such as relevant giveaways and coupons.

According to the results for document analysis, Papitube had been described as a prosumer matrix and it was possible that Papitubers would cooperate with each other. Seen from the content analysis, half of Papi's posts in December 2017 were promoting other Papitubers by sharing their videos, while other sample Papitubers' mutual promotion only happened when Papi made her debut in a popular online talk show.

Findings of extended research showed that though Papitubers were organized to participate in the same event, they didn't cooperate with each other directly. In December 2017, both Zoe and Acui posted videos with the hashtag “#泰突破 (Thai Breakthrough)” and “#活出新泰度 (Living a Fresh Thai)” in cooperation with Air Asia. In the extended research, Papitube's official Weibo account announced four Papitubers including Zoe and Acui would be involved in this commercial event. However, they produced completely independent videos. Only on Papitube's official Weibo account could the audience see all of the four Papitubers showed up in one video.

Most Papitubers largely increased the use of giveaways, more than half of which were cash giveaways, while others were coupons of gifts from the brand they cooperated with.

They also tended to use more topic-related hashtags. Using hashtags can create ad hoc channels that attract selective attentions from the users (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). However, the use of individual hashtags was only slightly and irregularly increased.

In general, with Papitube, Papitubers got more business opportunities. However, such opportunities appeared to be imbalanced among Papitubers. Key variables included the topic areas, which affected the accessibility of relevant brands, and the frequency of producing videos. Usually, the more videos a Papituber produced, the more opportunities he/she would get. Moreover, Papitubers got more money to promote their videos by using giveaways, which proved to be fairly effective.

4.2.5 Audience Engagement of Short Videos

Shares, comments and likes of each sample post were analyzed. In general, more than half of the audience feedback was about the topic of the video, while only a few shares and comments showed the concern about giveaways. Interestingly, around 30% audience engagement behavior was about neither the video's topic nor the giveaways. Instead, the audience showed their support and affection to the Papituber; some audience even gave advice how the videos could be improved.

Compared with unclear changes in the content of the audience engagement, the changes in the number of shares, comments and likes were obvious. All the recruited Papitubers' audience engagement increased tenfold in average. Especially when giveaways were used, the numbers increased up to around 40 times. Such changes were extraordinarily remarkable for those who had produced few poor-edited videos before joining Papitube.

4.3 Results across the evidence

Based on the results for the document analysis and content analysis, I extended the research on some details of the findings by taking memos from supplementary news articles and analyzing Papitube's official Weibo account. In this section, I will discuss the results across evidence from the document analysis, content analysis, and supplementary findings.

4.3.1 Divisions within Papitube

Seen from the facts, there are clear divisions within Papitube. Papi, followed by 27 million Weibo users, founded Papitube and remained to be unique among all Papitubers. She was becoming a star in front of the public, not only placing products in her videos, but getting the opportunity to be a brand endorser for New Balance and Jaeger-LeCoultre. Her role was diversified within Papitube as the top vlogger, content supervisor and the most important promotion channel for other Papitubers. Other Papitubers on the available list had followers ranging from 25 thousand to 2.6 million. The positioning and planning varied according to each Papituber's personal characteristics and their audiences' preference, but when the content creators were recruited at first, the basic principal had always been "head-support-bottom" (news article 9). Therefore, Papitubers who were less followed, their priority would be to concentrate on the content they produced.

4.3.2 Topic Areas Matter

Vloggers' ability to attract new audiences not only relied on the quality of their videos, but the topic areas their videos were located in. In 2017, the market for funny videos and food vlogs had become saturated, while videos about unboxings, make-up, pets and product

evaluations became popular (Bin, 2017). Therefore, some Papitubers with preferred concerns, such as BiggerLab, developed faster and acquired more business opportunities than the others (Yijiu, 2017).

Similar to previously conducted study (Wang & Ren, 2016; Marwick & boyd, 2010), my results show that Papitube obtained and maintained attention by targeting its perceived audience's interest and selecting partners of different topic areas accordingly; extending product line vertically can help accumulate audience and increase audience loyalty by targeting specific groups. Overall, most Papitubers' videos remained unchanged in terms of topics or category, which was in accordance of Papitube's commitment to develop content based on the vloggers' talents and interests. There were some exceptions in which the videos were less relevant to Papituber-produced videos' fixed categories. For example, during the activity in cooperation with Air Asia, Zoe and Acui produced videos more about traveling rather than makeup or drawing. These videos, according to Acui, had been edited more carefully than ever by a professional production team hired by Air Asia. However, the amount of audience engagement was only one third of the usual amount. Looking into the audience's feedback, their comments were mainly about the Papituber rather than the event itself. Compared with in-video advertisement, these videos were far less responded. Since promotion events like the business cooperation with Air Asia depended more on the vlogger's fan base instead of his/her talent, it could be less influential than those veiled by a video of the vlogger's original topic area which shared the most-demanded information for their followers.

4.3.3 The Tool Kit

Though the head of Papitube announced that they recruited content creators who were talented in various subjects, aiming to develop a prosumer matrix with diverse interests rather than making reproductions of Papi, the sample Papitubers were found largely adopting Papi's video pattern, though not completely, in both performing and editing style. However, since Papi's video pattern had been proved to be successful, it was possible that those recruited Papitubers were suggested to learn from successful experience of a top vlogger. For example, Acui was advised to strengthen her image by adding a slogan "I am Acui, the unofficially-recognized cutest vlogger on Weibo" in her videos (Chan, 2017). It was just like Papi's slogan, "I am Papi Jiang, a woman who combines beauty and talent", simple, funny, but powerful to build both awareness and image. Being exposed on Weibo and other social media where Papitube owned its channel, the slogan helped build a personal brand and achieved a high level of recognition through social networks, which was proved by a breakthrough in both the number of followers and audience engagement on Acui's Weibo.

Despite such similarities, the content analysis showed that not all Papitubers employed exactly the same tactics. Just as Huo, Papitube's COO, stated in one of her public speeches, they developed content of various interests and chose appropriate tactics from the tool kit provided by Papitube according to different topic areas and individual characteristics (2017). Zoe and Keira, both as vloggers concerning make-up area, appeared differently in their videos. Keira, with around 1/10 of Zoe's fan base, produced mainly pure tutorials.

Zoe produced videos of diverse content, including cosmetics unboxing, recommendations and pure tutorials. She stepped out of the room, did make-up in various occasions, used corresponding period voice and a lot of hand-drawn stickers, making her videos more of entertainment talk show.

4.3.4 Access to More Opportunities

Papitubers' efforts in the five categories of the content analysis interplayed in the practice. Seen from the data, huge gap between numbers of videos posted by Papitubers; the number of videos, the number of topics to choose from and the number of business opportunities are positively correlated. With assistance in video production and capital, most Papitubers produced more videos and acquired more promotion after joining an MCN, strengthening the win-win cooperation between the agency and its partners.

4.3.5 Loosely-structured Prosumer Matrix

Papitube, as a team, appeared to be loosely structured. In terms of organizational structure, team members of different functions were encouraged to contribute creative ideas in support of content production department. As for the content production itself, Papitube provided a tool kit to enhance productiveness and started to add a standard logo of Papitube in some Papituber-produced videos, but not all videos were attached with that logo.

Besides, mutual promotion hardly existed between recruited Papitubers. The link between Papitubers was only noticeable on Papi's Weibo and Papitube's official Weibo. Videos with several Papitubers showing up together consist of the main body of original

posts on Papitube's official Weibo, which usually attract more than five times audience flow than shares or reposts of Papitubers' videos. It is inferred that showing up together can create a sense of uniformity and result in increasing hits.

Though such collectiveness could generate positive effects such as enhancing the Papitubers' popularity as a whole, a more recent scandal of a Papituber @KatsandSid revealed the risk that a member's fault could bring shame on the MCN he or she stayed in and other member content creators would be victims. In more cases, Papitubers developed unbalancedly, largely because of the popularity of their topic areas and individual characteristics, thus the promised work opportunities and stable income were actually not fulfilled, leaving the majority of lower-class prosumers unpaid digital labour.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this section I summarize the main points, discuss the value of the study, and describe the questions my analysis raised that can be implemented for future research.

Multi-channel networks, as Mills (2014) stated, work to help video makers expand their social networks, tapping into specific markets and generating fan bases. Seeing practical cases, MCNs also provide professional assistance in content production. This case study examined Papitube's values as an MCN for individual content creators, which were primarily about content creation and resource management. A document analysis was conducted based on a total of 29 news articles, five official recruitment notices and other relevant information shared on Q&A forums, followed with a qualitative content analysis

of Papitubers' Weibo posts, of which both before- and after-MCN content was coded according to five categories relating to management and content production.

The answers to each of the two questions are presented below.

RQ1: what mechanisms of MCNs allow content creators to benefit in achieving social media success compared with individual work?

In classical social stratification theory, the ownership of means of production, class, status, party and occupation have been considered as key variables for stratification (Weber, 1947; Bourdieu, 1987). While in network communications, information sharing is crucial and high quality of information makes the virtual community member stand out (Fan, 2010). The document analysis and the first portion of content analysis revealed that Papitube focused on assisting content creators in both video production and resource distribution. With lowered thresholds for content creation, it is challenging for individual-generated content to stand out, which is not only about the quality of the content, but also the ability to produce content continuously. Papitube served as the solution to Papi and other individual content creators. With professional assistance in video production, Papitubers got opportunity to enhance the quality of their short videos while maintaining their originally interested topic areas.

Moreover, Papitube as a community was more capital-friendly compared with individuals, thus more resources could be introduced and distributed to member content creators (Xu, 2017). By joining Papitube, individual prosumers as paid digital labour could found multiple income streams more accessible other than ad revenue. Resources and

attention went to Papitubers in accordance with their status within this virtual community. Papi, who is at the top of Papitube, acquired the most resources and developed towards a real star rather than a micro-celebrity. Top members were responsible for promoting members of lower level, which represented collective efforts of the organic entity (Yang, 2017).

Joining Papitube, individual content creators were promoted not only by top Papitubers, but by a special marketing team which have the actual strength of the brand extension. According to the document analysis, Papitube tended to recruit more social media marketing talents, which could compensate for individual content creators' difficulty to strike the right balance between content production and promotion.

RQ2: What aspects of content creation have changed given movement from individual to MCNs?

Papitube provided professional assistance in content production. Seeing from the content analysis, similar performing and editing patterns such as the use of background music, larger-than-life acting style and the use of quick cutaways were found in individual content creators' short videos after their joining Papitube. All these tips came from Papitube's tool kit, which was continuously constructed by the experience of others in making short videos. Papi as the first member of Papitube and a widely recognized popular vlogger, contributed a lot to the tool kit, therefore her shadow was found, more or less, in other Papitubers' works. During the content production process, individual content creators would get advice from professional content planners and script writers of Papitube while

Papi would supervise the whole process from topic selecting to publishing to ensure interesting and well-edited content would bring more audience engagement. A sense of voluntariness may be reduced if the Papituber undergoes homogeneity due to uniform tool kits. To some degree, individual content creators lose the independence that social media have empowered them to act with.

By joining Papitube, most Papitubers got more opportunities to cooperate with brands, thus more placement could be found in the videos. This can be seen as an increase in the ownership of power. Nonetheless, risks lied that if a link were broken, the whole chain broke. In this way, an MCN could be a double-edged sword, either bringing individual prosumers more opportunities or leaving them as digital labour who still suffered from unpredictability in spite of MCNs' stated advantage.

5.1 Limitations

First, interviewing Papitubers directly could have complemented this study. However, this method was not adopted because of difficulty in accessing the interviewees. The data analysis methods of this paper were limited to qualitative document analysis and content analysis only, which becomes a limitation of the study. This way, it is possible that relevant information has been omitted. Although the content analysis verified some points of the stated values of Papitube, it was difficult to catch up with the changing goals that Papitube wants to achieve and construct a consistent tool kit systematically. Also, there was no consistent list of Papitubers available, therefore the sample was limited. However, small sample sizes may be associated with standard errors (Maas & Hox, 2005). Thus the samples

in this study might not be very representative since the current results showed that there were minor differences between Papitubers' works.

Furthermore, work in a rapidly evolving field may become outdated before the scheduled review (Shekelle et al., 2001). As MCNs in China are still in their infancy, the work models and strategies are evolving constantly. Analyzing the data in this study, I saw inconsistencies in the news articles. Since this study collected data from mid-2016 to the end of 2017, it may have been outmoded.

5.2 Contribution

This study developed a set of measurement objectives of MCNs' performance based on the definition of success over time demonstrated in previous studies, combining the characteristics of virtual communities and the prosumer production. Moreover, though MCNs are experiencing a boom in China, few studies have looked into this subject. This research is significant to the research of MCNs as it provides insight into booming multi-channel networks in China with an in-depth case study of the current top MCN, Papitube. With findings about its work model and tactics, people can understand why MCNs have been attractive for individual content creators.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

My findings revealing how MCNs work to assist individual content creators raised the question on potential homogenization of MCN members' content under the same model as Papitube, and how the MCN could function more effectively to enhance individual content creators' performance. Moreover, though Papitube ranked the first place on the list of

MCNs in China, other agencies on the list have developed variations that largely enrich the forms of MCNs in China. For example, compared with Papitube's discover-and-signup model, Onion Video chose to recruit a content production team and start a new video product internally. Existing social media platforms such as NetEase and Tencent, while cooperating with MCNs to attract high-quality content, have established their own MCNs and signed contracts with content creators. For future research, it would be interesting to expand the data set and include a variety of MCNs and analyze which model is more suitable for the Chinese market.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Collected News Articles for the Document Analysis

No.	Title	Date	Author	Source	Significance	Summary

1	Papi 酱和她的朋友霍泥芳：揭秘网红运营，名利背后“努力并操碎心” 浑水独家	2017.8.11	N/A	浑水自媒体江湖	5	Papitube's COO Huo and Papi's background; how did they start to produce their own media content; Milestones in Papi's operation; Operating details of Papitube
2	papi 酱亮相戛纳广告节 从“网红”走向广告界奥斯卡	2017.6.23	Blue	新浪娱乐	5	Papi and her team talk about their getting famous and future plan, including Papitube
3	我是 papi 酱 集才华与美貌一身的过气网红	2017.5.11	南七道李鹿	快科技	5	
4	秒拍知名短视频播主 LORI 阿姨：PAPI 酱推新第一人	2017.5.10	罗予岐	南方网	5	Papituber - Aunt Lori talks about her experience of starting to create short videos
5	玩梗的不如造梗的，所以 Papi 酱输给了咪蒙？	2017.5.9	N/A	钛媒体	5	Fewer advertisers choose Papi, the audience appear to be less interested in Papi's videos, because 1. Papi lacks originality 2. "Papi" is different from what the audience saw in the live-streaming 3. users are tired of short videos
6	专访 papi 酱，畅聊走红、咪蒙、标题党、灵感和焦虑	2017.4.24	张恒	新榜	5	how to produce a video; how to make use of inspiration; what role does Papi play in Papitube

7	拍卖会一年以后, Papi 酱找到了新的突破路径	2017.4.24	韩洪刚	36Kr	5	Papi becomes the gatekeeper of Papituber-produced content; she gradually grows into a star
8	捐了两千万的 Papi 酱说: 培养人才比买房子重要	2017.4.23	李小麦	腾讯娱乐	5	Papi donated a great sum of money, talking about how Papitube works to foster more content creators
9	Papi 酱经纪公司泰洋川禾获 1.2 亿融资, 杨铭称 Papitube 不是网红是自媒体	2017.4.7	韩佩	钛媒体	5	Mountain Top expanding its service line, PAPI tends to be a real-world star
10	甘做嫁衣! Papi 酱出镜率降低力推新人	2017.1.12	拾恩	今日网红	5	Papi lowers her exposure to popularize Papitube members
11	为什么 papi 酱越来越没意思了	2016.8.29	韩煦	新金融观察	5	Papi got finance but her content is not as interesting as before; Papitube doesn't seem to be the right way.
12	新偶像文化时代, 看 Papi 酱如何卸下包装“上岸”	2016.7.14	曾响铃	钛媒体	5	Papi and Papitubers fail in live-streaming; Live streaming is popular because of new idol culture and fans' keen on collective snooping
13	papitube 霍泥芳: papi 到 papitube mcn 的矩阵孵化之路	2017.12.20	N/A	新浪科技	4	Papi's development; Papitube's operation model and its future
14	papitube CEO 杨铭: 该放下的包袱我们已经放下 (附演讲全文)	2017.11.13	石灿	刺猬公社	4	

15	无论何仙姑夫还是 Papitube, 纯粹的 MCN 在中国是不存在的	2017.10.3	N/A	记者站网	4	How did Hexiangufu start; Papitube model; the difference between MCN in and out of China
16	papitubeCOO 霍泥芳: 不忘初心, 以不变应万变	2017.9.29	Chan Xiaoqi	搜狐	4	Papituber cases: How does Papitube assist these content creators?
17	Flipboard 红板报 独家对话 papi 酱: 好看的内容源自好看的灵魂	2017.7.20	N/A	楚北网 (随州)	4	How did Papi get famous; the difficulty in producing short videos
18	一条徐沪生比 papi 酱值钱, 短视频真的比直播更适合内容创业者吗?	2017.5.15	迟玉德	华商韬略	4	MCN is a wise choice for PGC; PGC in China is deleveling unhealthy
19	papi 酱红了一年多了, 未来她还会做些什么?	2017.4.24	N/A	腾讯时尚	4	Papi grows up into a star; established Papitube to foster more content creators and broaden methods of realization
20	papitube 签约作者 katandsid 暖心助力儿童公益活动“绘本时光”	2017.7.21	文文	N/A	4	Introduction to this activity and KatandSid
21	papi 酱被“杀死”了? 不! 她只是找到了新的赚钱方式 (重复)	2017.4.24	彭丽慧	网易科技	4	Papi becomes the gatekeeper of Papituber-produced content; she gradually grows into a star
22	融资、转型, papi 酱如何走上自己的“明星之路”?	2017.4.8	常芳菲	投资界	4	Mountain Top expanding its service line, PAPI tends to be a real-world star

23	传 papi 酱与 Angelababy 成同门 变现只能靠明星化?	2017.3.15	李静玉	娱乐资本论	4	Mountain Top recomposed. Papi gradually lost capitalist recognition, tending to be a star.
24	papi 酱并入 Angelababy 经纪公司 内容创业之困何解	2017.3.17	孟婕茜	新芽 NewSeed	4	Mountain Top expanding its service line, PAPI tends to be a real-world star, showing a new model of content realization
25	papi 酱团队: 罗辑思维原价退出投资, 一直很感谢罗振宇	2016.11.23	刘歆宇	澎湃新闻	4	LJSW abandoned Papi; Papi's team is trying multiple business channels but hardly works it out
26	Papitube 30 天收 2 万条视频, 新网红呼之欲出?	2016.5.25	N/A	新榜	4	Papitube makes its debut with 3 contributed videos, which are welcomed by fans
27	一只叫做“Papi 酱”的新蛋	2016.5.18	阑夕	21 世纪商业评论	4	Intellectual property still popular, Papitube will produce more micro-celebrities
28	揭 papi 酱生意经: 曾被估值三亿, 团队在挖掘	2016.4.25	程佳 赵振宗	腾讯娱乐	4	Papi develops from individual to an open platform; the key point of micro-celebrities' survival is continuously-produced content
29	专访 papi 酱合伙人杨铭: 热度下降是表象 广告情况更好	2017.12.21	N/A	新浪科技	4	The services of Papitube

Appendix B: Content Analysis of Papitubers' Weibo Posts

1. Papi

Category	Sub-categorizations	After			Before		
		Yes	No	NA	Yes	No	NA
Update Routine	1. Updating Short videos	3	13		4	3	
Video Content	2. Videos with a slogan	2	1	13	4		3
	3. Videos belonging to a usual category	3		13	4		3
	4. Primarily using corresponding period sound	3		13	4		3
	5. Primarily using voiceover		3	13		4	3
	6. Exaggerated performance	3		13	4		3
Video Editing	7. Videos accelerated	3		13	4		3
	8. Using background music		3	13		4	3
	9. Using subtitles	3		13	4		3
	10. Quick cutaways	3		13	4		3
Promotion	11. Advertisement	7	3	6		4	3
	12. Using giveaways	3	13			7	
	13. Promoting other Papitubers	5	11				7
	14. Cooperate with brands	1	15			7	
	15. Using topic-related hashtags	3	13			7	
	16. Using individual hashtag		16			7	

Audience engagement of short videos	17. Primarily about the topic	2		13	4		3
	18. Primarily about giveaways	1	1	13			7

2. Acui

Category	Sub-categorizations	After			Before		
		Yes	No	NA	Yes	No	NA
Update Routine	1. Updating Short videos	6	10		3	9	
Video Content	2. Videos with a slogan	4	2	11		3	9
	3. Videos belonging to a fixed category	3	3	11	3		9
	4. Primarily using corresponding period sound	3	3	11		3	9
	5. Primarily using voiceover	3	3	11	3		9
	6. Exaggerated performance	4	2	11		3	9
Video Editing	7. Videos accelerated	5	1	11	3		9
	8. Using background music	6		11	2	1	9
	9. Using subtitles	6		11	3		9
	10. Quick cutaways	5	2	11		3	9
Promotion	11. Advertising in the video	2	4	11		3	9
	12. Using giveaways	7	10		2	11	
	13. Promoting other Papitubers	1	16				12
	14. Cooperate with brands	6	5	6		12	
	15. Using topic-related hashtags	7	10			12	

	16. Using individual hashtag	4	13			12	
Audience engagement of short videos	17. Primarily about the topic	7		10	2		10
	18. Primarily about giveaways		6	11			12

3. Zoe

Category	Sub-categorizations	After			Before		
		Yes	No	NA	Yes	No	NA
Update Routine	1. Updating Short videos	16	29		14	55	
Video Content	2. Videos with a slogan		16	29		14	55
	3. Videos belonging to a usual category	10	6	29	8	6	55
	4. Primarily using corresponding period sound	14	2	29	10	4	55
	5. Primarily using voiceover		16	29		14	55
	6. Exaggerated performance	7	9	29	6	8	55
Video Editing	7. Videos accelerated	4	10	15		14	55
	8. Using background music	16		29	14		55
	9. Using subtitles	12	4	29	10	4	55
	10. Quick cutaways	11	5	29	10	4	55
Promotion	11. Advertising in the video	5	11	29		14	55
	12. Using giveaways	8	37		2	67	
	13. Promoting other Papitubers	2	43				69
	14. Cooperate with brands	18	36		1	68	
	15. Using topic-related hashtags	10	35			69	

	16. Using individual hashtag	3	42			69	
Audience engagement of short videos	15. Primarily about the content	26		29	14		55
	18. Primarily about giveaways	2	6	37			69

4. Nangnang

Category	Sub-categorizations	After			Before		
		Yes	No	NA	Yes	No	NA
Update Routine	1. Updating Short videos	11	8		1	1	
Video Content	2. Videos with a slogan	11		8		1	1
	3. Videos belonging to a usual category	11		8	1		1
	4. Primarily using corresponding period sound	11		8	1		1
	5. Primarily using voiceover		11	8		1	1
	6. Exaggerated performance	7	4	8		1	1
Video Editing	7. Videos accelerated	11		8	1		1
	8. Using background music	11		8	1		1
	9. Using subtitles	11		8	1		1
	10. Quick cutaways	11		8		1	1
Promotion	11. Advertising in the video	7	4	8		1	1
	12. Using giveaways	8	11			2	
	13. Promoting other Papitubers	3	16				2
	14. Cooperate with brands	9	10			2	

	15. Using topic-related hashtags	6	13			2	
	16. Using individual hashtag	3	16			2	
Audience engagement of short videos	17. Primarily about the topic	11		8	1		1
	18. Primarily about giveaways		8	11			2

5. Mica

Category	Sub-categorizations	After			Before		
		Yes	No	NA	Yes	No	NA
Update Routine	1. Updating Short videos	11	7		2		
Video Content	2. Videos with a slogan		11	7		2	0
	3. Videos belonging to a usual category	9	2	7	2		0
	4. Primarily using corresponding period sound	8	3	7		2	0
	5. Primarily using voiceover		11	7		2	0
	6. Exaggerated performance	11		7		2	0
Video Editing	7. Videos accelerated		11	7			2
	8. Using background music	11		7	2		0
	9. Using subtitles	1	10	7	1	1	0
	10. Quick cutaways	3	8	7		2	0
Promotion	11. Advertising in the video	2	9	7		2	0
	12. Using giveaways		18			2	
	13. Promoting other Papitubers	1	17				2
	14. Cooperate with brands	1	17			2	

	15. Using topic-related hashtags	2	16		2		
	16. Using individual hashtag		18			2	
Audience engagement of short videos	17. Primarily about the topic	11		7	2		0
	18. Primarily about giveaways			18			2

6. Keira

Category	Sub-categorizations	After			Before		
		Yes	No	NA	Yes	No	NA
Update Routine	1. Updating Short videos	8	11		4	26	
Video Content	2. Videos with a slogan		8	11		4	26
	3. Videos belonging to a usual category	8		11	4		26
	4. Primarily using corresponding period sound		8	11		4	26
	5. Primarily using voiceover	8		11		4	26
	6. Exaggerated performance		8	11		4	26
Video Editing	7. Videos accelerated		8	11			30
	8. Using background music	8		11	1	3	26
	9. Using subtitles	8		11		4	26
	10. Quick cutaways		8	11		4	26
Promotion	11. Advertising in the video		8	11		4	26
	12. Using giveaways	4	15			30	
	13. Promoting other Papitubers	1	18				30
	14. Cooperate with brands		19			29	1

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	15. Using topic-related hashtags	8	11		8	22	
	16. Using individual hashtag	12	7		10	20	
Audience engagement of short videos	17. Primarily about the topic	8		11	4		26
	18. Primarily about giveaways		4	15			30