

Narrating the New World of Work:

Gig Economy, Career Transitions, and Work-Nonwork Boundaries in Content Creation

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Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Career Transition Study

No.	Creators	Gender	Primary Content Type / Niche	Titles of videos included in the analysis	Filming Date(s)
1	Jade Beason	female	Personal Development	3. WATCH THIS BEFORE YOU QUIT YOUR JOB! HOW TO QUIT YOUR JOB AND MAKE MONEY GREAT RESIGNATION TRUTH	01/09/2021
				8. HOW I BECAME A FULL TIME CONTENT CREATOR IN 12 MONTHS Tips for content creators Make money online	17/11/2021
2	Devon and Willo	female	Everyday Life	3 Things I Did Before Quitting My Job Financial Tips to Becoming a Full Time Content Creator	03/06/2022
3	Natalya Alisia	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. I QUIT MY 9 5 TO FOLLOW MY DREAMS I'm A Full Time Content Creator!	10/06/2022
4	Breana Cooney	female	Personal Development	4. STORY TIME: God spoke to me in a dream...	30/05/2021
				3. i QUIT my 9-5 job... life update + what's next?	24/04/2022
				1. how i've successfully become a full time content creator! (working for myself, finances, & advice)	22/05/2022
5	Lynette Adkins	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life	2. i quit my job (and filmed everything)	30/06/2021
				7. life after quitting! july vlog	11/07/2021
				6. life after quitting my job (1 month update) august vlog	08/08/2021
				3. becoming a full-time influencer is an ADJUSTMENT productive day in the life of an influencer	10/09/2021
				5. things i wish i knew before quitting my job	09/11/2021
				4. i quit my job 1 year ago to be a content creator - here's everything i learned (& wish i knew)	23/06/2022

6	Shamar Shantel	female	Everyday Life	1. I Quit my 9-5 To Be A Full Time Content Creator Whats Next ?	23/04/2023
				3. My New Life as a Full Time Content Creator (it's not as easy as I thought!)	08/05/2023
				4. LIFE AFTER QUITTING MY JOB 6am Hot Yoga, Dentist Appointment, Target Runs + More ft. Try Treats	13/05/2023
7	Thandi Gama	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	2. I QUIT MY JOB TO CHASE A DREAM!	26/04/2021
				3. STEPS I took before quitting my 9 to 5 job to become a full time CONTENT CREATOR	03/09/2021
8	André Sampson	male	Personal Development	1. I Quit My \$110,000 Job To Be A Full Time Content Creator	25/08/2022
9	Love Reesie	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. How To Become A Full Time Content Creator Life Update Reesie Diaries	25/01/2021
				2. How To Be A Successful Content Creator Life Update - Mental Health, Going Viral + MORE #Dossier	26/07/2021
				3. How To Become A Successful Content Creator Q & A - Motivation, Brand Strategy, UGC Creator	06/07/2022
10	Lou xoxo	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. HOW I QUIT MY 9-5 JOB TO BECOME A FULL TIME ENTREPRENEUR?! MY 5 SOURCE OF INCOME Lou xoxo	04/04/2020
				2. Entrepreneur Life: I Quit My 9-5 for YouTube! Lou xoxo	30/10/2020
11	Asia x BJ	female	Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	2. I QUIT MY CORPORATE JOB FOR YOUTUBE!! I STILL CANT BELIEVE IT...	01/07/2021
12	Kelly Stamps	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Fashion & Style	1. I quit my job for YouTube and this is how it's been. (Two year update)	05/10/2021
				2. my day as a full-time youtuber: editing, thoughts on quitting and returning to college..	09/09/2022
				3. storytime: how I quit my first job lol	21/11/2022

13	Jordan Green	male	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I Quit My Job to Become a FULL TIME YOUTUBER (Law of Attraction Success Story)	28/11/2021
				3. Quit Your Job Before It's TOO LATE...	13/07/2022
14	Success By Sanjna	female	Personal Development	6. WHY I QUIT BIG 4 RISK CONSULTING?! HONEST TRUTH KPMG LEFT FOR A BANK MANAGER ROLE EXPERIENCE	12/11/2020
				1. I QUIT MY 9-5 CORPORATE JOB! WHAT'S NEXT? \$100K BANK RISK MANAGER KPMG BIG 4 ESCAPE	16/05/2021
				2. Going Back To Work? Regrets Quitting My Job? 9-5 Update Raw Chats With successbysanjna	01/08/2021
				3. Update: 6 Months Since I Quit My 9-5 Job... What's Next?	03/10/2021
				4. Why I Quit My Business 1 Year Anniversary Post 9-5 Job	13/03/2022
15	Grace Kim	female	Everyday Life	1. i just quit my job. and here's why...	06/11/2019
				2. i almost quit.	07/06/2021
				3. GRWM going back to a 9-5 job from full time content creator... yup, the reverse	27/12/2022
16	Vanessa Lau	female	Personal Development; Wellness; Everyday Life	1. WHY I QUIT MY CORPORATE JOB (FOR MILLENNIALS)	16/08/2018
				2. What It's Like To Quit Your Job COLD TURKEY To Start Your Own Business (STORY TIME FOR MILLENNIALS)	28/01/2019
				3. It's been 2 years since I quit my corporate job. Here's what I learned.	29/11/2020
				4. Thinking of quitting Youtube...	05/06/2022
17	Diamond Alicia	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. I Quit my 9-5 to be a Full Time Content Creator: My Story, Tips, + Thoughts	10/01/2022

				How to Stay Motivated as a Low Energy Content Creator My Tips & Confessions!	22/08/2022
18	Jalyn Baiden	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. How I quit my 9-5 and became a full time content creator	04/06/2023
19	Tia Tamara	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 TO BECOME A FULL-TIME INFLUENCER	24/04/2023
				2. I quit my job to pursue my dreams & this is how the 1st day went.. (chatty vlog, DIML)	02/05/2023
				3. I quit my job to chase my dreams as a full-time content creator 2 week update, how it's going	07/05/2023
20	That Girl Christelle	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 for content creation & influencing. REGRETS??	16/07/2023
				2. chitchat grwm: quitting content? reinventing yourself, your 20s, failure girl dinner in atlanta	24/08/2023
21	Maddy Outdoors	female	Personal Development	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 TO BECOME A CONTENT CREATOR	17/05/2023
22	iris wellen	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	b. my 6AM morning routine (on a workday)	10/04/2022
				a. my everyday life, get to know me (Q&A)	28/08/2022
				1. i quit my job.	07/05/2023
				2. my first day being self-employed how to create new routines & habits	24/07/2023
				3. life updates. finally telling you everything	10/09/2023
23	Sarah Haruna	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	1. Why I quit my 9-5 to focus on content creation full time The content Creators Safe space Episode 3	22/02/2023
24	piaiscool	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. HOW I QUIT MY 9-5 TO WORKING ON SOCIAL MEDIA (STORYTIME)	01/01/2022

				a. How I Built a Full-Time Income from Social Media!	19/01/2021
25	AmberSharnieceTV	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. I quit my job to become a fulltime content creator. Have I lost my mind?	30/04/2023
				2. The ONE thing I wish I knew BEFORE quitting my 9-5	19/06/2023
26	cakedbybabyk	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	1. I quit my 9-5 to be a content creator cakedbybabyk	23/02/2022
27	Paige West	female	Personal Development; Wellness; Everyday Life	1. The FINAL straw that made me QUIT my 9-5 job (& red flags)	19/02/2022
				3. I QUIT my Engineering job to do Gig Work, here's what I learned	13/03/2022
				2. My life changed after I quit my job.. here's what happened	25/08/2022
				4. I quit my 9-5 job and my life didn't change.	11/07/2023
28	Ky In Real Life	female	Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I Quit My Job for Content Creation & Entrepreneurship!	16/06/2021
29	Aneesha Locs And The City	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. I Quit My Corporate Analyst Job Focusing on Content Creation & Finding Me	07/07/2023
30	Austin Williams	male	Personal Development	1. I quit my job, and it was the best decision of my life	27/03/2023
				2. I Quit My Job With No Backup Plan And Here's What I Learned	07/07/2023
31	MISS YANYI	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I QUIT MY \$80K JOB FOR YOUTUBE Life Update & New Hair!	12/05/2016
				3. Why I Quit YouTube	08/11/2019
				2. why I failed at being a fulltime youtuber // What happened after I quit my \$80k job for YouTube	17/08/2020

32	Austen Tosone	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. Why I Quit My Job To Be a Full-Time Influencer	18/04/2021
				2. How I Left My Job To Work For Myself (Action Plan)	04/05/2021
				a. What I've Learned in 3 Years as a Full-Time Content Creator	09/04/2024
33	Emotionally Online Podcast	female	Personal Development	1. career cast: self-employment, content creation, and quitting your 9-5 emotionally online ep. #15	26/10/2022
34	Tori Nishino	female	Fashion & Style	1. How I left my Corporate 9-5 and became a Full-Time Content Creator High Vibe Podcast Interview	18/09/2023
35	Abigail Chin	female	Everyday Life	1. I quit my dream job as a corporate designer to become an entrepreneur/content creator Q&A + Tips	19/03/2022
				a. Answering all your juicy questions about me Q&A	05/06/2022
36	Celine	female	Everyday Life; Wellness; Personal Development	1. I quit my dream job to find my dream life	17/09/2023
				2. day in the life after quitting my 9-5 job finding routine, content creation, cute café	04/10/2023
				3. day in the life after quitting reality of content creation, finding discipline, honest chats	12/10/2023
37	Yolz Channel	female	Personal Development; Wellness	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 for YouTube Yolz Channel	01/04/2018
				3. 9 to 5 VS Full-time Influencer - reflecting 1 year later Yolz Channel	05/04/2019
				2. I Quit my job for YouTube (Life) UPDATE - My Regrets STORYTIME	29/03/2021
38	sereniky	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	I quit my 9-5 job to become an Influencer	27/09/2023
				i quit my job to be a youtuber & i failed.	11/02/2024

39	Morgan Green	female	Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 JOB With No Backup Plan & Here's Why	06/08/2021
				2. Quitting my 9 to 5 Job One Year Later: How It Has Been & Do I Regret It?	06/09/2022
40	Alison Thazin	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	I Quit My 9 to 5 Office Job Navigating 20s, Burnout, Being Jobless in the U.S.	14/09/2023
41	judine saintG	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. i went ALL IN on my full-time content creator dreams and today...	25/05/2023
42	Chelsea Callahan	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	I quit my 9-5 job to be a *full-time YouTuber*. My experience from the first 3 months...	16/02/2024
43	Explorcation	male	Personal Development	I Quit My Job HONEST Thoughts & Regrets 2 Years Later	01/04/2023
44	Cadence Stringer	female	Fashion & Style; Personal Development	I quit my corporate job // everything I learned	23/01/2024
45	Mutombo	female	Everyday Life; Wellness	I QUIT my engineering job! My thought process & everything I did to prepare for this.	07/07/2023
				I quit my corporate job 6 months ago. Here's what I've learned - *my honest advice*	31/08/2023

Table 2 Data analysis process for career transition paper

Data analysis stages	Research questions	Focused puzzle	Coding and developing	Merging, splitting and dropping	Relating and sequencing
Initial analysis--thematic narrative analysis	How do online content creators <i>understand and make meaning out of</i> their career transition from organisation employment to full-time online content creation?	Individual focused: How do individual creators describe their transition experience?	We watched the videos to familiarise ourselves with the data. We selected excerpts related to career transitions and generated initial codes using in-vivo and descriptive strategies. e.g., 'toxic working environment'	We compared and clustered codes to develop core categories, including: "a combination of reasons to leave 9-5 job", "in the making", and "challenges and gains of being full-time content creators". Similar codes were combined and refined to form overarching themes. e.g., split the reasons of quitting into three aspects: organisational factors, individual psychological factors and circumstantial factors	We connected codes in a processual sequence, mapping categories across different transition stages and identifying the connections between categories in each stage. e.g., three aspects of triggers were not separated but interacted in different ways in different participant's story. Instead of coding what are the factors in these three aspects, we recoded the different situations onto the interaction.
Re-analysis--structural analysis		Contextual focused: How do they structure these narratives and situate them within broader personal contexts?	We produced individual narrative portraits to develop a holistic picture of each participant's lived experience. We then elementally coded the abstract, background orientation, critical actions, and evaluations in their transition stories to identify the recurrent narrative structure.	We merged codes based on story structure of their stories. For example, we identified elements such as (1) recalling past work, life history and personality; (2) describing specific career struggles and evaluation on this events; (3) thoughts changing and taking actions to get out of the situation; (4) showing positive outcomes.	We integrated the codes into three story elements (attention building, the climax, and the triumph), aligned with a rebirth tale arc, revealing narrative progression and coherence.

Further analysis-- performative dimension		Linguistic focused: How do content creators linguistically perform their stories for audiences within the dialogic nature of online content creation?	We analyzed the videos and transcripts to identify linguistic strategies, including sentence emphasis, certain expression, and other linguistic features.	We divided the codes into three aspects: multiple temporal stages, pronouns shifts and affection elements.	The performativity elements were also shown in how they described their transition experience and how they framed their stories. It was a fundamental layer in their stories and special to this context.
<i>Note: The colours indicate different emphases across coding stages.</i>					

Table 3 Codebook for career transition paper

Integrated themes	Themes	Subthemes	Codes	Description	Representative quotes
Enacting the Transition Story: Two Temporal Stages					
	Triggers : Three Types of Interplays			Participants' transitions were shaped by overlapping forces, including creative interests, dissatisfaction with prior work, and chance events, illustrating how personal motivations, work experiences, and contextual influences intertwined to drive the transition.	
		Reorienting to content creation		For many participants, their transition to content creation did not happen all at once; it unfolded gradually through a subtle and accumulative reorientation embedded in everyday life. This interplay captures how individuals were pulled away from unfulfilling day jobs and drawn toward longstanding creative interests.	
			Passion for content creation	Participants expressed intrinsic enjoyment, curiosity, or personal interest in producing content, which motivated their ongoing engagement with content creation activities.	"I wanted to create them myself... I always... love the art of videography. How you can portray certain things and a certain way to show people what they're supposed to feel" (p49-3).
			Push-pull dynamic	Participants described their career transition as shaped by a push-pull dynamic: dissatisfaction, monotony, or misalignment in organisational work pushed them away from conventional employment, while creative interests and opportunities in content creation pulled them toward the new occupational path.	I felt like my corporate job, having that routine like that nine to five and just being boxed... made me a less creative person... my soul was calling to do something else. Something else is YouTube, but it's more than just YouTube. It's just creating. I'm a creator. (p41-1)
			Hobby-to-work progression	Content creation initially began as a hobby or side activity but gradually gained structure, commitment, and personal significance through repeated engagement, evolving into a more serious occupational pursuit.	I realized that I needed to focus my energy on something that I could excel at... I was averaging 5 hours of sleep per day, even on the weekends, working on my side hustles for about an hour of my commute to and from work, and working the hour throughout lunch. Hence why I never ate with my team. (p21-1)
			Work-creation tension	Participants experienced tensions between their creative content production and their full-time employment, including time constraints, conflicting priorities, and emotional strain arising from balancing both roles.	The problem came when my 9 to 5 became a little bit more demanding, but my YouTube side hustle was also becoming a little bit more demanding, [with] more emails, more admin. I was all a one-man show... Every day that went by, that just became harder and harder for me. I started...

					<p>hating, and that's a very strong word. But I was... struggling to focus on my 9-5 job. I was always... thinking about my side hustle. (p18-4/1); I was waking up every single day at 6.15 getting home at 7.15 ish and then I wanted to edit my videos sometimes I wanted to film videos which was very hard because yeah during the evenings I don't really have that much to film sometimes I want to see friends sometimes I want to see family and it was just all getting too much for me I felt like I was really burning myself out. (p31-1)</p>
		Natural succession from dissatisfied work		<p>Different from participants who gradually reoriented toward content creation as passion-pursing, some had dissatisfaction with their previous work and content creation became a natural successor to their careers.</p>	
			Unsustainable organisational work conditions	<p>Participants described their conventional 9-to-5 jobs as characterised by heavy work demands, burnout, poor work-life balance, and sometimes toxic workplace environments, which together made organisational employment feel unsustainable and prompted consideration of alternative career paths.</p>	<p>It was just just know that every single day was a huge challenge. Every single day was tough. There was no time for breaks. There was no time for breathing. There was no time for anything. Because you're filing all day. You're picking up constant incoming phone calls and just the queue never dwindles down. It's just constant, constant, constant for eight plus hours. And then you do it again the next day. I quickly felt helpless there just because I felt like there was no let me just say, usually I could thrive in administrative work, but it just was not. (p38-1)</p>
			Content creation as an alternative path	<p>Online content creation emerged as a viable alternative career direction alongside or in contrast to participants' conventional employment.</p>	<p>I just wanted to take a little break off working... and then go back to work but it just never happened because I honestly did start getting busier into doing YouTube and I was getting more orders... so I really didn't see the point of... going back to work. (p14-1) [In this online community] We do a variety of things. We bake, we talk, we cry, we play lots of games. The community is really amazing... I was able to get connection from a whole bunch of different people throughout this world from in front of a camera on my computer... Twitch made me realize that I'm enough... There are people in this world that will be interested in you for you... You don't have to question their motives. (p38-1)</p>
		Chance-triggered transition		<p>Participants' transitions into content creation were initiated by unexpected chance events rather than long-standing passion or gradual dissatisfaction. These events acted as catalysts, reviving entrepreneurial ambitions</p>	

				that had previously been sidelined in their careers.	
			Entrepreneurial mindset	Participants demonstrated an entrepreneurial orientation characterised by initiative, opportunity seeking, and a willingness to pursue independent and self-directed work through content creation.	I've always known in the back of my mind for a very, very long time that I've always wanted to work for myself (p36-1).
			Chance event triggers	Unexpected events at either the individual level (e.g., personal opportunities or encounters) or broader social level (e.g., societal changes or trends) acted as catalysts that initiated or accelerated participants' transitions into content creation.	What really like triggered me it's like I got like a letter from...business office, and they were like... is this still an active business?... Why do you need to dissolve your business? I was like... [they are] contacting me about my inactive business while I'm out here at this job... just a reality check. (p29-1); I always thought that I would just be working in corporate America until my 60s when I retire... although I knew I wanted to work for myself at some point... content creating wasn't as much of a career path back then, but I feel like nowadays, like when you see the statistics on how much creators make... it gives like me hope... make real money from this. And I think people are starting to see it as a real career path. (p26-1)
	Adaptation to Online Content Creator Career			Participants described challenges associated with the uncertain nature of online content creation, including unstable income, fluctuating audience engagement, pressure to focus on platform metrics, and frequent comparison with other creators, all of which shaped	
		Platform work challenges		Participants described challenges associated with the inherent uncertainty of online content creation, including unstable or inconsistent income, fluctuating audience engagement, and doubts about the long-term sustainability of their creative output and the industry more broadly.	
			Financial insecurity	Participants experienced uncertainty and instability in income generated from content creation, which created financial pressure and concerns about the sustainability of this form of work.	I don't really ever know when the next paycheck is coming in, and especially with brand deals because they have net 30, they have net 60. I'm still waiting on a paycheck from a brand deal that I did like two months ago. (p27-3); I've gotten deals and I've been able to work with brands, but it was not a sustainable, livable income for sure.(p29-1)
			Metrics-driven pressure	Participants described feeling pressured to focus heavily on platform metrics such as views, likes, and subscriber numbers, which shaped their content decisions and	How well you do is based on a whole bunch of numbers and it's really hard to not diminish yourself to just a bunch of numbers when that is how you're making your income (p38-1).

				influenced their sense of success or failure.	
			Social media comparison	Participants frequently compared their performance, growth, or content with other creators on social media platforms, which influenced their motivation, self-evaluation, and emotional experiences.	There was a point where I had to get off and stop consuming because there was this girl I followed. I love her content and it's just like everything she posted and went viral... I was like, what am I doing wrong? (p29-1); "I've been a content creator for over six years. I've been posting this YouTube channel, the Post on Instagram. I started to talk maybe a year or so after it came out. And, you know, I always am in that stage of like, I feel like I'm behind. I feel like I'm behind everyone else. Like there's so many people who have like 5000 subscribers and they're getting like paid brand deals and stuff like that. And everything that I've gotten has always been like gifted and stuff like that. So for me, for a long time, it was really hard for me to kind of, you know, not compare myself to other people and get a little down. But like they say, comparison is the thief of joy"(p24-2)
Authoring the Transition Story: Accomplishing a Rebirth Tale					
	Tension-building: Confronting Inner Constraints			Participants introduced personal and contextual constraints that made their transitions difficult, often through reflective moments that highlighted tensions and helped drive their narratives forward.	
		Self-doubt		Participants expressed uncertainty about their abilities, decisions, or legitimacy in pursuing content creation as a career.	It [YouTube] has been something that I've always wanted to do, but I felt super self-conscious. I thought people would make fun of me... I'm always thinking about how I'm perceived by other people...try to avoid hard situations
		Questioning about what constitutes a "real" career		Participants referred to broader societal narratives that define what counts as a "real" career, which shaped their reflections on the legitimacy of pursuing content creation.	She's like... what are you going to get a real job?... people don't respect content creation... They're like, anybody can do that... it's not a real job
	Climax: Breaking Through Constraints			Participants described key moments as internal shifts in mindset, marked by a sense of empowerment, self-authorship, and freedom from others' expectations. These moments were framed as breakthroughs in which they overcame prior constraints.	
		A new sense of self-worth		Participants described developing a stronger sense of personal value and self-recognition as they	I realized I'm not going to wait for things to happen before I start reaching for my goals because I'm worthy of them now

				engaged in content creation and reflected on their career transitions.	
		Redefining success		Participants described a shift in mindset in which they rejected socially imposed definitions of success and instead embraced alternative values aligned with their personal goals and lifestyles.	I realized that I needed to stop seeking this path of becoming a boring adult and start dreaming again, to not let money, opportunity and security scare me away from doing what I want
		Growing self-confidence		Participants expressed increasing confidence in their abilities as creators, often emerging through experience, experimentation, and positive feedback from audiences.	I'm in a good place where I believe in myself more and I'm confident in my abilities... Some people might think that I was stupid to do that... But I know that this is the right path for me" (p36-1).
		Asserting personal agency		Participants described moments of clarity that enabled them to break away from external expectations and take control of their career paths, reflecting an active assertion of personal agency.	I put my limiting beliefs aside. I put my fears of what other people would think aside, and I just did what my heart was telling me to do" (p27-3).
	Triumph : Self-transcendence After Transition			Participants contrasted their past and present selves to portray their transitions as journeys of personal growth and increasing confidence. Through this comparison, they framed the shift into content creation as moving beyond earlier limitations and societal expectations toward a more authentic sense of self.	
		Outgrowing the former self		Participants described leaving behind earlier versions of themselves, portraying their transition as personal development and growth beyond past limitations or identities.	Previous Tia was the type of person that would put her feelings behind other people's feelings, even when it came to a job that I hate it... like I want to quit, but they probably need me... that was younger me. And I'm not feeling that way right now... I'm doing this for me.
		Breaking social norms		Participants framed their transition as challenging or stepping outside conventional social expectations regarding stable careers, success, and acceptable life paths.	I realized I had to stop letting society dictate how I live my life and to stop giving everything a deadline according to society's standards...I had been brainwashed by society into believing I wanted to fit in with the masses. (p8-2)
		Identity reinvention		Participants presented their transition into content creation as an opportunity to redefine who they are, constructing a renewed sense of identity aligned with their values and aspirations	"Once I took the leap of faith on myself... I had to transcend the old me. I had to let go of the life that he was living because I can't be the new me living my old life" (p17-1).
Performing the Story: Linguistic Strategies					
	Audience-oriented narrativ			Participants used linguistic and rhetorical strategies—such as direct address, conversational tone, and	

	e perform ance			persuasive framing—to perform their narratives for imagined audiences, reflecting the dialogic and audience-aware nature of online content creation.	
		Dialogic audience address		Participants directly addressed viewers within their narratives, speaking to the audience as if in conversation. This dialogic style reflects the interactive and relational nature of online content creation.	It's not just about the beauty, the fashion, the lifestyle... I want to share as much of my life and my story and my pains and my gains with you. I hope... I can help somebody find that courage" (p41-1).
		Multi-directional temporal framing		Participants structured their narratives by moving between past experiences, present reflections, and future aspirations, creating a sense that their transition into content creation was inevitable and the "right" decision.	I truly programmed my subconscious mind to believe that I was a full-time YouTuber... I remember one day...I was at work at the register... I grabbed one of the sticky notes and I wrote down my routine as a full time YouTuber. What a day in the life would look like for me as a full-time YouTuber.... it got my mind working in that direction. (p17-1); Looking at my other managers and directors' job and thinking about the long term right, like what I want to do or who I want to be in five- or ten-years' time. I got her a job and I told myself do I really want to have their job? (p46-1)
		Pronoun shifts in narrative		Participants strategically shifted pronouns (e.g., "I," "we," "you") when telling their stories to engage audiences, create identification with viewers, and strengthen the performative quality of their narratives.	"I'm a creator and I love to be artistic, and you want to pursue something in your life, you just have to do it...we just need to really evaluate ourselves and... ask ourselves like what are we doing" (p41-1).

Table 4 Demographic Characteristics of Content Creators Included in the Netnography Study

No.	Creators	Gender	Primary Content Type / Niche of Lifestyle-Based Content Creation	Titles of videos included in the analysis	Filming Date(s)
1	Devon and Willo	female	Everyday Life	1. Day In The Life of a Full Time Content Creator Struggling to feel Productivity & Planning Content	19/08/2022
2	Love Reesie	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. Day In The Life Of A Content Creator, MLK Weekend Reesie Diaries	02/02/2021
3	JazaéNicole	female	Personal Development; Wellness	2. Day In The Life as A CONTENT CREATOR Bts of what you don't see, this is a lot of work!!	18/04/2021
				1.a *Realistic* day in my life as a full-time content creator & influencer	09/08/2022
4	Natalya Alisia	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. WEEK IN MY LIFE as a full time CONTENT CREATOR botox + filler appt, Lorna Jane haul, + more!	24/06/2022
5	Breana Cooney	female	Personal Development	1. day in my life as a content creator: 5:30 am workout, a photoshoot, my first massage, & a God story!	12/06/2022
6	Lynette Adkins	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life	1. day in my life as a content creator working less, creative advice, taking & editing pics	06/07/2022
7	Shamar Shantel	female	Everyday Life	1. Weekly Vlog - Day In The Life of Full Time Creator Workout Routine Grocery Haul And More	18/04/2023
8	Thandi Gama	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	1. A week in the life of a full time content creator [Video Diary]	27/03/2023
9	Creating with Kaya	female	Personal Development	3. Week In the Life of a Full Time Influencer Creator Events, Shooting Content, Facebook Hacking...	18/04/2023
10	Helen Liao	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. day in my life as a full-time content creator/"influencer" (ft. octoly) korea quarantine 2021 vlog	17/03/2021
11	Lou xoxo	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. A "REAL" Day in a Life of an Influencer/Entrepreneur Recording Content + Shipping Orders + More	24/06/2021
12	Asia x BJ	female	Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. A Day In The Life of a Youtuber... And This Happens!! Im Just Asia	23/12/2021
13	Kelly Stamps	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Fashion & Style	3. my day as a fulltime youtuber: taxes, writing, editing	11/08/2020

				2. my day as a full-time youtuber: editing, thoughts on quitting and returning to college..	09/09/2022
				1. A day in my life as a content creator!!	20/07/2024
14	Jordan Green	male	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	1. A Day in My Life as a FULL-TIME YOUTUBER	11/03/2022
15	Success By Sanjna	female	Personal Development	1. Work Day In The Life Full Time Content Creator Come To An NFT Exhibition With Me In Sydney	16/03/2022
16	Samantha Nicole	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. DAYS IN MY LIFE AS A CONTENT CREATOR *bts taking IG pics by myself & how I edit my pictures!*	11/03/2022
				2. VLOG: work day as a content creator *BTS of taking content* ft. Loving Tan	02/09/2022
17	lindseyrem	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1.VLOG: my typical work day as a ~content creator~	21/03/2021
				2. week in my life weeknight meals, volunteering, health update	08/05/2023
18	linh truong	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. a day in my work life as a full-time youtuber	14/06/2021
				2. another 7am productive day in my life ~ finding work-life balance, time management, & notion tour	19/08/2022
19	Jaz Turner	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	2. a day in my life hitting 400k on tiktok, I was on a podcast, going out, new pilates studio	06/08/2023
				1. A WEEK IN MY LIFE finding my motivation, home decor, going out	05/09/2022
20	Makeup By Alissia	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. day in the life of a full time content creator errands, GRWM, opening PR boxes + more!	21/10/2021
21	Sarah Hawkinson	female	Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. a day in my life as a full time ~content creator~	28/04/2021
22	Elyse Myers	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. spend the day with me (a full-time content creator)	15/07/2022

				2. Behind the Scenes: Spend the day with a full-time content creator	18/04/2023
23	Celine	female	Everyday Life; Wellness; Personal Development	1. day in the life after quitting my 9-5 job finding routine, content creation, cute café	04/10/2023
				2. day in the life after quitting reality of content creation, finding discipline, honest chats	12/10/2023
24	Chelsea Callahan	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	2.. Regular days in my life in my 30's (running, trying new things, NYC vlog)	04/10/2024
				1. My *unfiltered* life alone in New York City (in your 30's). A vlog.	13/09/2024
25	Austen Tosone	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. 📺 VLOG - content creation day, poshmark process, errands + more	24/10/2023
26	Aneesha Locs And The City	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. Not working a 9-5, slowing down, fear of expectations, i just wanna be ok Realistic Day In My Life	20/12/2023
27	tapiocapress	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. a day in my life without a job quitting corporate, how much I saved, dealing w/ self doubt	17/08/2023
28	Courtney Sarracino	female	Wellness; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FULL-TIME CONTENT CREATOR	21/07/2023
29	Lucy Raine	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. DAY IN MY LIFE as a full time content creator 🎧 realistic WFH day, brand deals, editing, + shopping!	30/08/2024
30	Hannah Elise	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. an average WFH day in my life as a full-time content creator	25/06/2023
31	Basically Britt	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. 24 Hours as a Full-Time Illustrator & Bookish Content Creator day in the life	08/11/2024
32	SavWay	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. a Day In My Life as a CONTENT CREATOR	18/07/2022
33	Nitraa B	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. Day In The Life of a FULL TIME Content Creator Batch Creating! NitraaB	24/07/2023
34	Becca and The Books	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. A Day In The Life Of A Full-Time YouTuber (Content Creation, Reading, Cooking & Work Outs) 2023	01/10/2023

35	Simone Nicole	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. A VERY productive day in my life as a full time Content Creator	29/11/2023
36	basicallyreese	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. day in my life as a content creator (what you don't see behind the scenes)	17/03/2021
37	kaeli mae	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	DAY IN MY LIFE VLOG as a content creator appts filming cleaning planning	19/06/2023
38	Carrie Dayton Vlogs	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Personal Development	a work day in my life (as a full time content creator in my 30s) & TTPD thoughts!!!	26/04/2024
39	Kaiti Yoo	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	a truthful day in the life as a full-time youtuber. (what we REALLY do behind closed doors.)	16/06/2021
40	Darling Desi	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Fashion & Style	My First Day as a Full-time Youtuber making cottagecore & romanticizing life videos	13/06/2021
41	Hannah Ashton	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	a WFH day in my life as a full-time content creator + tips for creating	21/11/2023
42	Caitlin's Corner	female	Wellness; Everyday Life; Personal Development	WORK WEEK IN MY LIFE reality of being a full-time content creator	13/10/2023
43	alia zaita	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	2. Productive Days In My Life In NYC as a full time content creator	17/03/2024

Table 5 Codebook for netnography study

Integrated themes	Themes	Subthemes	Description	Representative quotes
Visibility-oriented labour filter			A mechanism that transforms any activity into self-representational labour when it is performed or even anticipated with an audience in mind.	
	Audience as the activating presence		Participants experienced the presence of an imagined or actual audience as a motivating force that shaped their actions, encouraging them to produce content, share experiences, and maintain engagement on digital platforms.	
		Constitutive audience awareness	Participants demonstrated constant awareness of their audience when producing content, considering viewers' expectations, preferences, and reactions as an integral part of their creative process.	"Even if you don't ever comment or engage, just you even viewing my videos, like you guys are literally the reason why I'm here." (p6-v2) ; "I think we've all kind of been raised to be that way, and so when you feel like you're not checking enough things off your to do list in one day, or you're not spending enough time, quote, unquote, working, you start to feel like you're not doing enough"(p1-1)
		Internalised audience gaze and anticipatory labour	Participants internalised the imagined gaze of their audience and platform expectations, engaging in anticipatory labour by shaping content in advance to meet perceived viewer interests and platform dynamics.	"When I'm talking to the camera, like I'm very aware that I am talking to you guys, like there's no part of me that ever feels like I'm talking to myself... you guys can't respond to me. I can't hear your voice. I know that you're listening. I mean, I know that you guys will listen... this is just how I am and how I talk and interact."; "I'm gonna eat my lunch quickly in the car, and then I actually have a massage booked at 2pm around the corner... So gonna eat my food in the car, listen to some music and then go to my massage at 2pm so let's eat lunch together." "You know it's kind of peaceful eating my food in the car. I mean, I don't prefer it, but it's kind of peaceful." (p5-1)
	Transforming Personal Activities into Self-Representational Labour		Participants converted everyday personal activities and experiences into content that represents themselves online, turning aspects of daily life into material for creative production and public self-presentation.	

		Filming everyday routines	Participants reframed ordinary daily practices—such as skincare routines, outfit selection, grooming, caring for pets, household chores, or exercise—as moments worth documenting and sharing as content.	“So sorry, I’m trying to look presentable (p19-2).”; “My makeup is also, like, all smeared off my face because my face was like, pushed up in the little massage chair thing (p5-1).; “Once I have makeup on, I feel like I can be myself with the camera (p1-1).”
		Filming social interactions	Participants frequently recorded interactions with partners, family members, or friends, capturing both deliberate conversations and incidental background moments as part of their content.	[Partner]: “She would rather the flavour of things compared to what... she actually needs to achieve her game.” [Participant]: “Okay, tell them what to look for when you’re buying stuff... so when you’re buying protein, right? You want to look for something that the calories... match the protein.” (p7-1)
		Sharing personal reflections	Participants incorporated their inner thoughts, emotions, moods, and spontaneous reflections into their content, turning personal commentary and incidental experiences into narrative material.	“It’s incredible just how amazing it feels to be up so early. Feels so good and so accomplished (p5-1).”; “Quick update on the kitchen. I added some plants, some more plants to make it... more colourful in here, so it looks really good. Some of these are real. Some of these are fake (p2-1).; “no, say you’re lying. Whoa, why? Just open the sock and it’s only one pair of white, it’s literally only one sock for the white sock. Where’s the rest?” (p7-1).
		Incidental events	Participants incorporated unplanned or spontaneous moments from their daily lives into their content	"no, say you're lying. Whoa, why? Just open the sock and it's only one pair of white, it's literally only one sock for the white sock. Where's the rest?"(p7-1)
	Platform-mediated work-life integration		Participants described how content creation intertwined with their personal lives, creating blurred boundaries between work and everyday life. Their identity became closely tied to their content, domestic spaces were adapted for production, and they experienced ongoing tension between maintaining productivity and preserving personal wellbeing.	

		Productivity dilemma	Participants experienced tension between maintaining consistent content production to sustain visibility and protecting their creativity, wellbeing, and personal time.	I think we've all kind of been raised to be that way, and so when you feel like you're not checking enough things off your to-do list in one day, or you're not spending enough time, quote, unquote, working, you start to feel like you're not doing enough. (p1-1); "I think it's weird, because my job is also fun, so I have a hard time seeing it as work, and I feel like I didn't do enough work today, and that, like, realistically, I did so much today, I shot so many videos, and I edited a couple along the way... and I vlogged, but I feel like I didn't do enough today"; "I didn't even get on my computer at all today, so maybe that's why I felt like I didn't do enough work today. But yeah, that was my day as a content creator, my workflow and my work day."(p1-1); ""Day two is not off to the best start. I stayed up too late watching The Last of Us. Then I slept in until 830 and I scrolled on social media till now, till nine, my sweet spot is really waking up at seven or earlier. The closer I creep to like eight, I just feel like I wasted time "(p9-1)
		"My content is me" identity framing	Participants framed their content as closely tied to their personal identity, presenting their creative output as an extension or expression of who they are.	I'm gonna now go and get my nails done with my friend... then I might be getting dinner with someone a little bit later, and I'm probably gonna vlog that... my life is not me sitting behind a desk making content all day. My Content is me. So therefore, my life, my work, is me being out and enjoying life, which is a huge, huge again shift for me in terms of how I've seen work in the past. (p6-1)
		Blurred work-life boundaries	Participants described how the boundaries between work and personal life became indistinct as everyday experiences were continuously integrated into content creation.	I remember the first day that I was like really working for myself... And I was like on social media all day long, and I was just like... what did I do today... you posted so much, and you created so much, and you answered so many emails... that now qualify as your work... so many people look at social media as personally just personal whereas like I look at it as my job... it can feel like a fine line (p5-v1)"
		Reshaped domestic spaces	Participants adapted or reorganised their home environments to support content production, transforming domestic spaces into sites of creative work.	""I watch some tick tock in bed to wake up " (p1-1)

	Transforming backstage work into representational work		Participants turned behind-the-scenes efforts—such as preparation, editing, planning, and everyday routines—into visible content, making previously private or hidden work part of their public self-presentation.	I basically cleared out my area over there. I set up my light, and I just have the area for my try on haul. I move my desk over in the room. I have stuff everywhere, but it's clean... my issue is I don't feel like this is enough light, but I don't have any other sources of light...I'm probably gonna find a way to, like, hook them up to create like, so like a bounce off up here on me. (p7-1)
	Labour-Adjacent Zone		Moments that are not actively performed for the audience but remain tethered to content creation	
		Reflections on work relationship	Participants reflected on their evolving relationship with work, considering how content creation reshaped their attitudes toward labour, motivation, and the meaning of work in their lives.	The biggest shift for me lately has been in realizing that my life is my content so that I can focus my life on me... instead of forming my life around making content... I might be getting dinner with someone a little bit later and I'm probably gonna Vlog that... my life is not me sitting behind a desk making content all day. My content is me (p6-v1).
		Content consumption as everyday practice	Participants described routinely watching other creators' content as part of their daily lives, such as viewing videos while eating or catching up with favourite YouTubers in the morning. These practices reflect how content consumption becomes integrated into everyday routines within the creator ecosystem.	"I'm gonna try to turn on a YouTube video, and just watch a little something and then enjoy my dinner" (p5-v2); "I now spend the first few minutes of the morning or the first 10–15 minutes of the morning catching up on my favourite Youtubers" (p18-v5).
Presented Boundaries: Curating Visibility			The way creators consciously craft and navigate the boundary itself through decisions about what to share, how to share it, and when to withhold.	
	Gate the filter		Presented boundaries function as gates that regulate what becomes visible and what remains off-stage. Rather than a fixed divide, they operate as shifting thresholds that determine which personal moments can be transformed into content.	"It's just show them my list. It's all scribbled, and Darren made a list that is ineligible. Is that the word ineligible... [ask her partner] Is there anything private on there? (p9-1).

	Reframe the boundary as labour		Presented boundaries are not only gates but also labour practices. Choosing, explaining, and editing these boundaries requires time, effort, and strategic consideration.	"I really feel like I had to be organized and had to be, you know, cranking out content all the time. But I think... the biggest shift for me lately has been in realizing that my life is my content, so I can focus my life on me... taking care of myself, doing the things that I want to, hang out with friends... I can make content around that. Instead of forming my life around making content."(p6-1)
	Calibrate intimacy		Presented boundaries also operate as a calibration tool, allowing creators to regulate the level of intimacy they share with their audience.	"I'm gonna wrap up the vlog here, because tomorrow we're going to spend time with Pico's grandparents, and I'm not gonna vlog that (p7-1)."