Two Tales of Digital Self-Entrepreneurship

Abstract

While video blogging (vlogging) has become one of the new generation's top career choices, less is understood about how class origins shape the career pathways and future aspirations of youth vloggers, particularly amidst times of platform precarity and future uncertainty. This study sets out to examine the various ways in which digitally savvy young people coming from different socio-economic and family backgrounds engage vlogging as a career. Extending the Bourdieusian framework, it explicates how a divergence in the everyday experiences and practices arose among differently situated digital aspirants. Drawing on in-depth interviews with professional YouTubers in Hong Kong, where neoliberalism and social inequality prevail, the analysis offers a nuanced account of the class-inflected work-life dynamics, whereby differences in material constraints and opportunity costs engender various orientations and attitudes internalized by the middle-/upper-class and working-/lower-class vloggers towards digital self-entrepreneurship. Revealing the diverging ramifications of the development of digital habitus for the youth vloggers' creative labour and future aspiration, the study expands sociological understandings of how social inequality is reproduced at digital creative work, while illuminating the understudied linkages between social class and platform work in the new creative industry of digital content creation and entertainment.

Introduction

Video blogging (vlogging) as one of most popular career options among the younger generation worldwide is sometimes portrayed as a game-changer in equalizing paths towards potentially prosperous (self-)entrepreneurships (Fonseca, 2014; Tullman, 2015). The tale goes, nowadays, creative newbies coming from humble families are enabled by social

technologies to initiate their self-enterprises of content creation and influencer marketing by micro-broadcasting themselves simply using a handy digital device and following a few steps (see Ashton and Patel, 2017 for a critique). Albeit an encouraging possibility, increasing algorithmic monetization and competition raise question of whether professional vlogging is essentially a privileged career choice under platform capitalism where digital divide and class rigidity have been known to persist (Anderson, 2017; Schradie, 2011; 2012). This is particularly the case in the new creative industry of digital content creation and entertainment in that growing 'individualization of risk' (Beck, 1992) featured in the new sectors of post-industrial economy tends to require young people to rely upon their own and additional resources for enacting and sustaining their pursuit of digital self-entrepreneurship.

Whereas extant literature has investigated some of the downsides of digital creative work by observing its 'non-standard' and 'always-on' nature (Bradlet & Pargman, 2017; Davies et al., 2017; Duffy and Wissinger, 2017; Richardson, 2017), little is known about how class origins shape the career pathways and future aspirations of youth vloggers, particularly amidst platform precarity and future uncertainty. As yet, the bulk of existing studies has been premised on seemingly universal suffering among uniformly exploited new creative workers, rather than examining the differences between more and less privileged youth. Much remains to be understood regarding the understudied relationship between digital creative work and broader social inequality. Filling these gaps, this study sets out to examine the various ways in which digitally savvy young people coming from different socio-economic and family backgrounds engage vlogging as a career. Extending the Bourdieusian framework, it explicates how a divergence in the everyday experiences and practices arose among differently situated digital aspirants.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with young professional YouTubers in Hong Kong, where neoliberalism and social inequality prevail, the analysis offers a nuanced account of the class-inflected work-life dynamics, whereby differences in material constraints and opportunity costs engender various orientations and attitudes internalized by youth vloggers towards digital self-entrepreneurship. Specifically, it shows that thanks to their abundance, the middle-/upper-class youth vloggers commonly experienced and expressed strong senses of creative labour, while upholding a hopeful and aspirational view on the pursuit of vlogging as a career prognosticating that their labour-time investment in building their YouTube channels will be eventually rewarded by monetary return, social influence and/or entrepreneurial development into the future. By contrast, due to their scarcity, the working-/lower-class youth vloggers tended to take a rather instrumental and pessimistic view of content creation and influencer marketing. Over time, they came to perform pragmatic types of (un)creative labour in exchange for immediate returns and payoffs, while increasingly engaging preoperational production activities for exploring alternative future work opportunities in case of career failure. As such, the middle-/upper-class and working-/lower-class vloggers were endowed with various forms of digital habitus, which in turn pre-disposes them to embody and practice different types of creative labour and future aspiration in the newly emerging field of professional vlogging. Revealing these diverging ramifications of the development of digital habitus tied to class origins, the study contributes to sociological understandings of how social inequality is reproduced at digital creative work, while illuminating the understudied linkages between social class and platform career in the new creative industry of digital content creation and entertainment.

Class inequality and digital habitus

The proliferation of social technologies continues to create new employment opportunities that change the contours and meanings of work. Among others, digitization has given rise to the new creative industries characterized by user-generated content and digital streaming. Extant literature has paid much attention to how (self-)exploitation and commodification of (immaterial) labour power take place under platform capitalism (cf. Brown, 2014; Coté and Pybus, 2017; Fuchs, 2010; Lazzarato, 1996), documenting new creative workers' job insecurity, algorithmic control and work-life imbalance. Others have investigated the emergence of so-called 'venture' or 'aspirational labour' (Duffy, 2017; Neff, 2012), caused and driven by the platform's 'promise of social and economic capital; yet the reward system for these aspirants is highly uneven' (Duffy, 2016: 441). Despite the importance of the attempts examining platform capitalism and its underpinning processes, much of this scholarship has treated the effects of economic exploitation and social alienation as non-discriminating across new creative workers. As a result, existing studies often fail to acknowledge that platform mediated risks and sense of precariousness are not equally faced by all in the emerging digital creative economy, especially since social technologies tend to extend real-world inequalities into digital arenas, thus aligning the on- and offline worlds and reinforcing their hierarchies in mutually constitutive ways (Castells, 2000; Rainie and Wellman, 2012; Ting, 2016).

Overlooking the interactions between digital and class inequalities may lead to the 'mythologies of creative work' (see Duffy and Wissinger, 2017 for a critique) typically circulated in popular media and public discourses, which disproportionately concentrated on and celebrated a few selected successful stories of professional vlogging while omitting the less successful ones. When the largely problematic assumption being generalized to all the new creative workers, it emphasizes solely on the emancipatory effects of social technologies

that have been mostly tasted and enjoyed by more privileged youth in terms of work autonomy and self-realization, while downplaying or inadvertently obscuring the vicious experiences of platform precarity and their deleterious effects, especially on those who find themselves living and working in lower socio-economic circumstances. This is particularly the case through the Covid-19 pandemic and global economic downturns, as income gaps among professional vloggers have been widened due to shrinking vlogging spaces in public areas and declining company spending on influencer marketing in social media. While academic ideas are expanding with a growing number of scholarly discussions about the gendered and racialized aspects of digital creative work (e.g. DeVane and Squire, 2008; Duffy and Pruchniewska, 2017; Shaw, 2015), they are often not grounded in the analysis of social class. As yet, very little attention has been paid to how the digitally savvy yet socially and economically disadvantaged youth came to engage professional vlogging.

In an attempt to full these gaps, this study extends Bourdieu's notion of habitus to investigate the reproduction of class inequality in the new creative industry of content creation and influencer marketing, focusing on how class origins shape production activities and future aspirations among youth vloggers coming from different socio-economic and family backgrounds. Accordingly, habitus has to do with a certain attitude and way of acting or behaving that an individual would have internalized to act and interact with others and the environment (Bourdieu, 2005). As Bourdieu contends, 'habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history' (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). In this view, how an individual acts and positions oneself in a particular field of action is conditioned by the habitus of the person, defined as an internalized framework of action that translates into dispositions of thought, interpretation and style in relation to the person's being and know-how (Bourdieu, 1984).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, it is because the ideas, knowledge, skills, and competences gained from the person's class-inflected experiences are deposited and subsequently processed within and by one's habitus derived from one's class origins.

In the contemporary context of professional vlogging, an extended Bourdieusian notion of digital habitus thus provides a useful and dynamic framework to account for the reproduction of class inequality in the pursuit of digital self-entrepreneurship. Robinson (2009), for instance, invokes the concept of 'informational habitus' (Robinson, 2009: 491) to examine the stratified patterns of the use and access of the Internet among American youth in examining the persisting digital divide in and across the United States. It was contended that low-autonomy, low-quality Internet access may lead to the development of a 'taste for necessity' among youth in their rationing of Internet use, while youth with high-quality Internet access may develop a skhole (Bourdieu, 1990), that is, a stance of 'playing serious' towards online information seeking. Along these lines, for this study, class origin is an important context, in which digital habitus takes shape among youth vloggers and, subsequently, generates relatively stable routine practices of content production and influencer marketing. In addition to the impact on the youth's schemes of interpretation for undertaking production activities on a daily basis, it also significantly influences the ways in which they make plans for their platform career into the future, as repeated performance of new creative cultural practices may shape people's future orientations in both ways (Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Stetsenko, 2010; 2015; Ting, 2017; 2019).

Notably, however, this dynamic reproduction of class-inflected work-life dynamics that tends to favour the more privileged ones should not been seen as mechanistic, since habitus is essentially generative and consists of reflexive capacities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1996).

What it means to this study is that while differences in digital creativity and commitment to professional vlogging between more or less privileged vloggers are by and large a result of their class-inflected material constraints and opportunities costs, they are best understood in terms of the youth's dispositions to digital self-entrepreneurship derived from their class origins. That is to say, social class is not simply conceptualized as a set of constraints or enablers, but rather understood as overarching culturally specific activities for exercising habitus, whereby actors can be endowed with field-circumscribed agency in action. For this study, therefore, the goal is not to adjudicate which set of vlogging or marketing practices are inherently effective or advanced, but rather to investigate how these new creative and cultural practices are shaped by digital habitus tied to social class.

In the sections that follow, the analysis will employ the Bourdieusian framework outlined above to explicate the divergence in digital habitus internalized by differently situated youth vloggers situated. It will illustrate the ways in which their digital habitus is derived from their day-to-day experiences of abundance or scarcity. The findings will further reveal how these orientations or attitudes towards professional vlogging engendered distinctive patterns of content production and career planning. By highlighting the practical consequences of these dispositional patterns at digital creative work, the study explicates the intimate and intricate relationships between digital creative work and boarder social inequality.

The Study

The study employed in-depth interviews with young professional YouTubers in Hong Kong to understand the linkages between class origins and platform careers, focusing on how their class-inflected work-life experiences and vlogging practices were mediated by digital habitus

amidst platform precarity and uncertainty. As a method of reconstructing experiences and meanings, in-depth interviews enabled discovering unexpected ways that the youth vloggers coped with challenges and made entrepreneurial decisions under a range of socio-economic circumstances. More specifically, in the context of this study, they allowed for the possibility of generating new insights into the (trans)formation of the youth's digital habitus and how it guided their production activities of content creation and audience engagement as well as their future aspirations for vlogging as a career over time. A total of thirty-six YouTubers aged between 20 and 29, who self-identified vlogging and its related influencer marketing activities to be their major sources of income, were interviewed to understand their experiences and practices tied to class origins. The recruitment of informants started with a search through press coverage and social media of YouTubers to generate a list of informants. Potential participants were contact, followed by the use of snowball sampling method to generate an additional list of potential informants for more interviews.

Since the study is primarily interested in the interactions between social class origins and professional vlogging within the Bourdieusian framework, it defined class using mainly economic and social criteria. Following Weber's (1968) conceptualization of social class and Lareau's (2003) empirical work on unequal childhoods, it identified upper-, middle-, working- and lower-class youth vloggers using interview questions that probed the occupations their parents had, the neighbourhoods they lived in, their parents' education levels and their interpretations of their families' socio-economic circumstances from the past to the present. While the bases or sources of their class identification varied, middle- and upper-class youth vloggers usually grew up in financially stable families mostly with both parents working as high-skilled workers in professional, administrative or technical positions. Since most of these jobs require university education, their parents commonly held university

degrees or above. A few of their parents were also successful entrepreneurs in traditional sectors. By contrast, working- and lower-class youth vloggers mostly came from families supported by manufacturing or other low-wage jobs, while most of their parents did not go through post-secondary education. In terms of neighbourhood, many of the working- and lower-class youth vloggers grew up living in public housing subsidised by the local government, and it was also more common for them to have only one of the parents working as the main source of income in support of the family households.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the earlier stage and, later on, online through the COVID-19 pandemic. They were recorded with participants' consent and guided by a set of open-ended questions. By enabling informants to elaborate on issues and turning points that they considered most important to their work-life experiences and socio-economic circumstances, the nature of the in-depth interviews is well suited to the study as it facilitates gauging each informant individually and following up on new leads. Each interview lasted about two hours. Topics of discussion included the informants' class backgrounds, work routines, audience engagement activities, motives for their engagement in the new creative industry and their future plans for vlogging as a career. The interviews were transcribed and read for analysis. Materials collected in this research were analysed using an interpretive approach (Denzin, 2010; Madison, 2012), which recognizes the youth vloggers as active subjects and examines the class-inflected experiences and practices of digital self-entrepreneurship. They were used to reflect upon the informants' perceptions of their career pathways and the decisions they made at each stage of their platform careers, thus offering reflexive accounts of the linkages between social class origins and professional vlogging, along with the structures of feelings associated with their accounts. Key themes emerging from the interviews constituted the starting points of analysis. They were further analysed for

the generation of categories and the search for common patterns (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Subsequently, they were interpreted and organised to construct meaningful scholarly discourses for answering the research questions of the study.

(Under)Privileged Content Creation Tied to Class Origins

Participation in digital creative work tends to result in senses of precariousness, especially given increasing platform monetizations and competitions among peers. However, senses of precariousness are not equally shared by all, as youth vloggers are more exposed to platform mediated risks than others. During the interviews, informants recounted that whether they developed strong senses of precariousness was by and large influenced by their class origins. Although algorithmic controls and demands have been universal phenomena in the YouTube-sphere, middle-/upper-class vloggers tend to be more capable of coping with the challenges. In fact, some of them were aware of their class privilege as well as of how it granted them with more autonomy and opportunity in the pursuit of digital self-entrepreneurship. Paul, for instance, 'confessed' about how his higher-class position translated into relative advantages at digital creative work, compared to those coming from lower socio-economic and humbler family backgrounds:

> I want to add that some vloggers may be restricted by their humble family backgrounds at [digital creative] work. I think this can be a bit common in this [new creative] industry. Many successful YouTubers that I know personally come from middle-class families and received higher education. Just by looking at their home space or where they go for vlogging, it is obvious that many of them are rich. At least they don't have to worry about their living. If not, I don't think they can keep doing what they are doing that a lot of people can't.

Part of what Paul referred to in explaining the relative advantages of middle-/upper-class vloggers is the lower opportunity costs that they bear during professional vlogging, especially since digital self-entrepreneurship represents one possibility among many for them. By contrast, working-/lower-class vlogging had to make deliberate choices and thus carried with them a higher opportunity cost. William shared his view:

> I come from a working-class or grassroots family. My home doesn't have the exclusive space for me to vlog and my family can't provide any resources for me to develop my vlogging career either. Well, I know a few YouTubers, whose families have spaces that are nicely decorated for them to vlog, having their own designated rooms or venues for content production. They have pets and fancy things that they can vlog with. What I mean is that their lives are already colourful and ready to be vlogged. But my home doesn't have a whole lot of sundries or any pets are interesting to be vlogged. A different life, a different career pathway, I guess.

While the more privileged youth possessed more material resources at their disposal for high-quality content creation and digital streaming, the less privileged ones reported a domino effect caused by a lack of material resources. Simon, a working-/lower-class youth vlogger, added his experience to the picture:

> I don't think the better-off vloggers and us are the same. I don't think they practice vlogging as work; they just make video for fun. They lived rich lives already, so the money they earned from content creation is a bonus or some extra sweetness for them.

But for us, vlogging is work and it's about life and death. Our families are a bit poor, so we have to pay full attention to what we vlog and focus on what we can achieve. […] I made rules for myself. I need to make and upload one vlog per week. Although it still depends on the actual production processes, I think it's quite necessary to get one vlog out every week or five vlog per month. Also, the view counts of these vlogs need to be high. Well, it's still fine if the view counts of the two of them are lower, but the those of the other three need to be high.

Not only did the working-/lower-class vloggers worked with higher opportunity costs, they also had to grasp every opportunity that they have in order to vlog at home. Especially in the contemporary context of Hong Kong, where living space is limited and intergenerational co-residence persists to be the family norm, many youth vloggers had limited access to available space for content production or livestreaming at home. This was illustrated by Simon in his recount:

For content creation, what is needed is a place that is quiet, and there should be no one making noise or interrupting the process of shooting. Besides, the background of the shooting needs to be at least pleasant, which is certainly not the case of my home. In fact, I cannot find a suitable space to shoot vlogs at home.

Another problem is that I feel embarrassed when shooting with the presence of my family under the same roof. It is already difficult to shoot in with presence of others, not to mention that they are your family. It just feels odd. My parents, they always look serious and rigid. They don't understand what I'm doing. If they watch me shooting a vlog, I can't say what I want in front of them. Even if I close the door, I still feel that

someone who doesn't appreciate what I do is listening out there. It's another kind of pressure.

Without a fixed workplace or workstation traditionally to be provided by the employee, the spatial constraints carry additional opportunity and emotional costs for the working-/lower-class youth vloggers, in terms of the space-time that they can encroach in order to vlog at home.

Developing (Un)Creative Labour with YouTubing

The previous section has detailed the different levels and forms of material constraint and opportunity experienced by youth vloggers varied by class origins. This section explicates how these variations impact on the young digital aspirants, particularly regarding the ways in which their creative labour is (trans)formed in everyday vlogging activities. Essentially, a divergence arises between middle-/upper-class youth vloggers who experienced vlogging as a meaningful process of creation and working-/lower-class vloggers who developed an instrumental attitude towards professional vlogging. Indeed, many of the middle-/upper-class youth vloggers experienced YouTubing as a genuine expression of their creative selves. They usually refused to spend time on vlogging something that they did not find interesting. As shared by Vincent:

I like being a YouTuber because you can make video whenever you want and about whatever you want. The videos that I shoot were mainly about domestic travelling, so I can also experience different things during the trips. I learned a lot the destinations that I travelled in Hong Kong while vlogging. […]

If I vlog about whatever that makes money, my channel will deteriorate [in the sense that audience may lose interest in it] and become solely a marketing platform. So, I have been highly selective and rejected some of the jobs [of influencer marketing]. In the past two years, I have rejected far more jobs than I have taken. Basically, I may only accept one of the five jobs that were offered to me.

Thanks to their abundance, Vincent and other more privileged youth vloggers came to enjoy more opportunities to vlog willingly and experienced strong senses of creative self. Over time, a digital habitus was developed, whereby the middle-/upper-class youth vloggers consciously differentiated creative labour from uncreative labour, while concentrated on performing the former. In turn, this exploratory attitude towards professional vlogging allow these youth vloggers to derive the benefits that accompany the development at digital creative work:

The original intention of vlogging should be doing it for people who like them. It should not be just about view or subscription counts, nor should it be valued in terms of monetary returns. If you are too concerned with the monetary returns, then you will not be able to enjoy vlogging. And this is the paradox: If you do not enjoy it, you cannot produce good and creative vlogs that people would like.

Therefore, middle-/upper-class youth vloggers commonly perceived professional vlogging in ways toward self-realization. Besides, they believed that only so they could become or stay creative in order to build strong audience-ship, which is the key to become a successful vlogger on YouTube. However, for working-/lower-class youth vloggers, they tended to developed a different digital habitus oriented towards immediate returns and

payoffs. May and Cyrus coming from humble family backgrounds were running a YouTube channel together as couple. According to them:

> May:
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> On a daily basis, we look at which types of videos are popular.
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> When we first uploaded our videos on YouTube, we discovered that videos about shopping on Taobao and trips to Shenzhen were popular. So, we started to make more of these videos and they were somewhat successful.
>
> Cyrus:
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> We constantly keep track of the view counts even when we don't want to look at them anymore.
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> May:
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> Because we need to analyse them.
>
> Cyrus:
>
> Yes, we have to analyse them in order to know what the audience' interests are. Only then, we can make more videos that people like. This year, we also started to analyse their comments to know better what they like these days. […]

As opposed to the middle-/upper-class youth vloggers, working-/lower-class vloggers tended to vlog about what the audience like, instead of what they like. As revealed in the recounts shared by May and Cyrus, they even performed extra labour, the so-called customer research, in order to vlog more what they audience may like watching but what they are not interested in creating. The development of such digital habitus is commonly shared by the less privileged young YouTubers. Rebacca, a vlogger of a lower-class origin, described how this attitude gradually took shape:

Five or six years ago, my vlogs were purely based on my personal interests. I didn't care that much about the numbers of 'like' and subscription. However, I am mostly concerned about whether people will watch and 'like' my videos. This becomes the ways in which I come to decide what I vlog next every day, instead of about whether I like to make this vlog or not.

Moreover, the digital habitus internalized by working/-lower-class youth, in turn, led to an ambiguous type of (un)creative labour. This becomes obvious in Gordon's recount:

About a year ago, I began to shoot more low-cost videos, such as gaming and shopping vlogs, to maximize my profits. And somehow these low-cost videos are more popular with the audience.

But actually, I don't like to make these videos. My channel started with short movies. This has been what my channel is about. But I had to make these low-cost videos to keep my audience-ship.

[What is the ratio between the low-cost videos and short movies?] Gordon:

I think it's about 10 to 1. I make ten low-cost videos for a living so that I can make one short movie to satisfy myself, because it is what I want to do and enjoy doing.

Indeed, the working-/lower-class youth vloggers were commonly aware of their digital habitus and its negative consequences, which they could not get rid of. As revealed in the interview with Rebecca:

I really don't like that I only focus on the achievement for making a living while deciding what to create on YouTube. I wasn't like this before. I used to have a playful mentality in creating digital content. Even though some of the vlog I used to create were not as popular as those of today, I was very happy through the process, and the audience will sense and feel your happiness. […]

Last year, I became obsessed with my achievement, whether there will be enough people watching and 'liking' my vlogs, so I made a plan, that is, to produce one vlog each day so as to boost up the view and subscription counts. Eventually, it resulted in pressure sores all over my head and other emotional problems, from which it took me months to recover.

As we have seen in Rebecca's accounts, class origin has a direct impact on vloggers' creativity and motivation to vlog over time. This was echoed by May during the interview:

I just don't want to do this anymore. Cyrus always says that videos about travelling in Thailand are more popular among the audience. I know, but would also say that I don't want the topics of my channel and my vlogging activities be solely determined by my audience. I also want my channel to be reflecting upon my life, maybe something that I personally find interesting. I mean, I want there to be vlogs about our entire life, not only concentrated on aspects that I'm no longer interested in. I don't want to limit myself. I want my channel to be diversified.

For Gordon, May, Cyrus and other working-/lower-class youth vloggers, most of their vlogging activities were experienced as a kind of 'necessary evil' that they have to perform on a daily basis. For them, most of their vlogging activities became somewhat habitual and

were performed unwillingly in exchange for some moments of creation, if any at all. Due to their senses of scarcity, they had to produce content in the hope of being able to create. By contrast, given their senses of abundance, middle-/upper-class youth vloggers were more capable of turning leisure into work or vice versa. They were engaging, literally, in digital 'creation' as opposed to mere content 'production' practiced by their counterparts. While the former promotes and renews creativity, the latter exhausts and objectifies creative labour.

Planning towards (Un)Certain Vlogging Futures

Accompanying digital habitus that guides content creation and influencer marketing on a day-to-day basis, differences in material resources and opportunity costs tied to class origins also articulate opposing sets of attitudes that oriented youth vloggers towards diverging career planning. From a conventional perspective, professional vlogging involves high occupational risk in that it not only lacks the guarantee of a fixed income or employment contract but also a clear career path for social and economic mobility. Yet, despite the platform uncertainty, middle-/upper-class vloggers generally perceived the labour-time they spent on professional vlogging to be something accumulative into the future. Paul's narrative evidences how more privileged youth vloggers confront platform uncertainty with a self-confident attitude:

> Nowadays, whether and how you can obtain social influence and attention is the key to all kinds of business. Even if my YouTube career would fail one day, I have accumulated the experiences and built up my skills; they would be invaluable for my future, even if I would no longer be a YouTuber. I think this is a kind of investment [in myself].

For Paul and other middle-/upper-class vloggers, the uncertain future is considered to be somewhat 'certain' at the first place. Rather than constantly being concerned about the possible consequences of platform uncertainty, they generally imagined that even if they ceased to be a YouTuber one day, the efforts they made and experiences they gained at professional vlogging would not just vanish. Benefited from such ultimately hopeful future orientation, instead of holding back, many of them continued to invest more and to engage more in the digital creation and entertainment industries. As shared by Paul further:

> I've been thinking whether I should expand my channel. 'Investment and return' are the values I uphold. I won't spend a lot of money on my hobbies, but I can invest a great deal in my channel. For one, I'm thinking about forming a team to make Mandarin subtitles for my videos, so that my channel can target not just the Hong Kong market [but also mainland China …].

As we can see, this is how the more privileged youth dealt with platform uncertainty. They came to embody a rather genuine (self-)entrepreneurial labour and dared to embrace more risks as a form of investment into the future. By contrast, the interpretations of vlogging future look quite different for the less privileged youth. In particular, while many of the professional YouTubers had to give up their traditional nine-to-five jobs, there were generally fears that the kinds of experience these young people accumulate through the non-standard employment of YouTubing may not be recognised or appreciated by future employees in the traditional work sectors, thus squeezing their salaries and making it difficult for them to find full-time jobs again. As a consequence, these working-/lower-class vloggers were more likely to engage in preparational labour for alternate careers simultaneously while pursuing digital self-entrepreneurship. William reflected upon such dilemma in the interview:

In the world of YouTube and algorithm, things are changing every day. You never know what's next in the industry, and for how long you [your channel] will last. I have been gradually shifting my work toward post-production, for instance, I am editing more and more videos for others, just in case. I have also been trying in the education sector. I have been teaching kids visual production at some local schools.

Unlike the more privileged youth, who focused on and invested in their digital self-entrepreneurship without reserve, the less privileged youth constructed their own 'certain' futures amidst platform uncertainty. To this end, many of them engaged in preparational labour for alternate careers, which, to a certain extent, deviants them from the pursuit of vlogging as a career.

Conclusion

Despite the popular tale about how youth coming from humble families may reach wealth and fame in an age of social media, it has been increasingly evident that better-off new creative workers who enjoy more material resources and carried fewer opportunity costs are in a radically different spots than their counterparts who must vlog while coping with challenges and constraints. The gap between the more and less privileged vloggers has yet to be adequately addressed, particularly among the younger generations who tend to rely more upon their families of origin for the necessary or additional resources to enact and sustain their digital self-entrepreneurship. Thus, this study sets out to examines the interactions between class origins and professional vlogging by investigating how social class shapes the youth's everyday production activities and future aspirations in the new creative industry.

In particular, the study explicates the ways in which material constraints and opportunity costs tied to class origins shape vloggers' attitudes towards the pursuit of digital self-entrepreneurship. Extending the Bourdieusian framework, the analysis shows how digital habitus developed among digital aspirants engender rather opposing types of creative labour and future orientations towards professional vlogging. In general, the more privileged youth were more likely to experience and express a creative sense of self at digital creative work. In turn, they became more self-confident about exercising their genuine creativity with YouTubing and came to consciously avoid uncreative, repetitive content production, regardless of algorithmic control and management. By contrast, the lack of material resources and high opportunity costs faced by the less privileged youth tended to push them to adopt an instrumental attitude towards professional vlogging. For them, while they are concerned with the graduate losing of control of creative labour, they had to devote most of their labour-time to content creation that likely guarantee immediate payoffs. Findings of the study also reveal a divergence arose in their attitudes towards vlogging futures. In the face of platform uncertainty, while middle-/upper-class youth tended to interpret the consequences of such uncertain 'future' from a perspective of investment,' working-/lower-class youth came up with their own 'alternate future' in case of career failure. Ultimately, while the former created a productive environment for the better-offs to concentrate on content creation and entrepreneurial expansion, the latter distracts the underprivileged from pathways towards professional vlogging.

This study bridges a research gap by aligning the studies of digital and social inequalities, centering on the intersections of digital creative work and class origins. Specifically, it illuminates the processes whereby socio-economic and family backgrounds

were translated into digital habitus at work, which, however, furthers the gaps in both the youth's current and future participation in the digital creative economy. Casting light on these findings, future research needs to be more critical about the repercussions of boarder social inequality that by and large persists in the emerging worlds of social media and platform economy, while exploring the understudied linkages between class origins, families and career development of among digitally savvy yet differently situated youth.

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