

Changing Nature of Capitalism in the Era of Globalization through YouTube: A Perspective of Consumerism

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary concept of globalization emerged during the 1980s under the influence of leaders like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who promoted privatization as a pathway to globalization. This idea gained widespread popularity in the 1990s. Postmodern scholars such as Paul-Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Arjun Appadurai, and Douglas Kellner argue that globalization is a top-down process legitimizing capitalist logic, where technology plays a pivotal role in fostering "techno-capitalism." In the 21st century, digital media platforms have become instrumental in generating surplus value for capitalism through various mechanisms. YouTube, as a prominent video-sharing platform launched in 2005, has played a significant role in this process. This research critically examines the role of YouTube in promoting consumerism as a tool of capitalism, exploring its impact on modern digital economies and cultural consumption patterns.

ABSTRAK

Konsep globalisasi kontemporer muncul pada tahun 1980-an di bawah pengaruh para pemimpin seperti Ronald Reagan dan Margaret Thatcher, yang mempromosikan privatisasi sebagai jalan menuju globalisasi. Ide ini memperoleh popularitas yang luas pada tahun 1990-an. Cendekiawan postmodern seperti Paul-Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Arjun Appadurai, dan Douglas Kellner berpendapat bahwa globalisasi adalah proses top-down yang melegitimasi logika kapitalis, di mana teknologi memainkan peran penting dalam mendorong "teknokapitalisme." Pada abad ke-21, platform media digital telah menjadi instrumental dalam menghasilkan nilai lebih bagi kapitalisme melalui berbagai mekanisme. YouTube, sebagai platform berbagi video terkemuka yang diluncurkan pada tahun 2005, telah memainkan peran penting dalam proses ini. Penelitian ini secara kritis mengkaji peran YouTube dalam mempromosikan konsumerisme sebagai alat kapitalisme, mengeksplorasi dampaknya pada ekonomi digital modern dan pola konsumsi budaya.

A. INTRODUCTION

Everyone uses Digital media platforms irrespective of age group, caste, class, religion, or gender. According to Global Media Insight (GMI), YouTube is the second most popular platform after Facebook and the second largest search engine after

Google. As of October 2024, it has 2.70 billion users worldwide, is owned by Google LLC, and has headquarters in California, United States. (YouTube Statistic, 2024). YouTube provides various content e.g. music, dance, comedy, education, news, travel vlogs, cooking, podcasts, etc. 80 plus languages are being used for making videos, but the most popular languages are English and Spanish. (YouTube Statistic, 2024).

Table 1. Most popular YouTube channels globally (data collected up to 20th November 2024)

Name of the Channels	Number of Subscribers
Mr. Beast	331 million
T-series	279 million
CoComelon	185 million
SET India	179 million
Kids Diana Show	127 million

Source: www.youtube.com

Out of the five channels with the highest number of subscribers on YouTube worldwide, two are from India, T-series holds second position, and SET India is the fourth largest channel. T-series launches various movies and music videos. Sony Entertainment Television (SET) India produces videos related to reality shows, dramas, mythology, crime shows, etc. US citizen Jimmy Donaldson owned the biggest and most famous channel, in the name of 'Mr. Beast'. He is a philanthropist and makes challenging task-related videos, known for his massive giveaways. The other two channels are related to children's shows (www.youtube.com) (Figure 1).

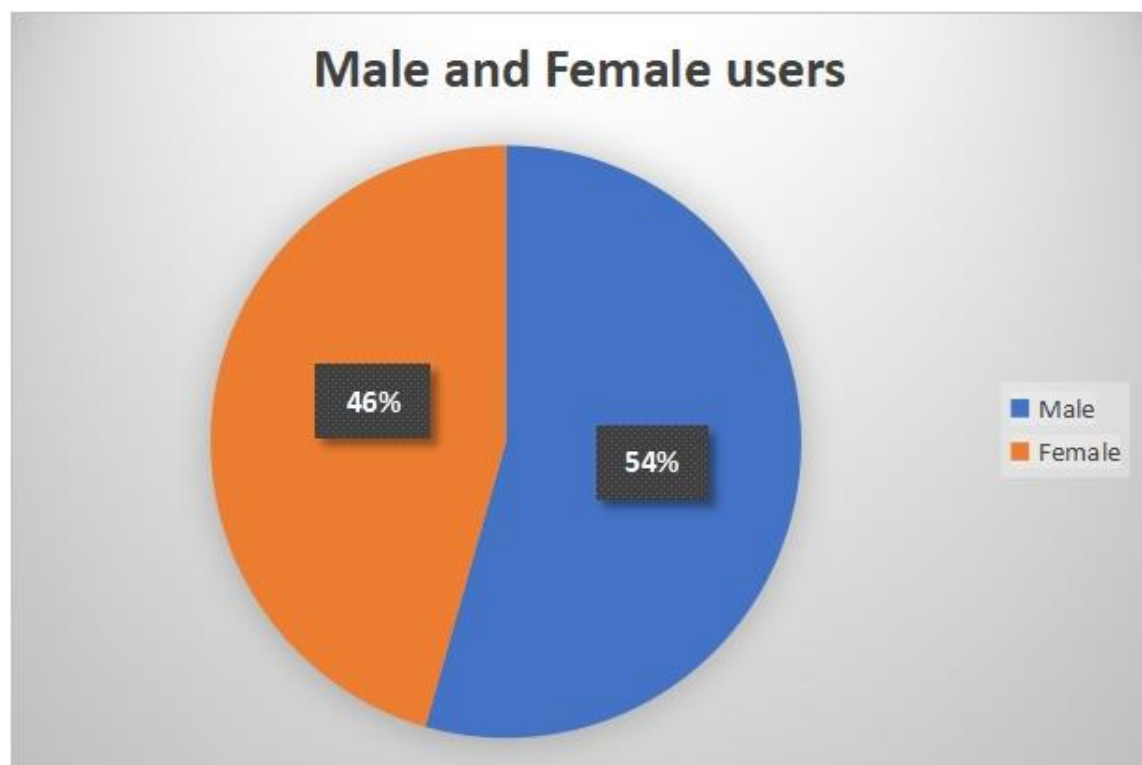


Figure 1. Percentage of YouTube users by Male and Female

Source: Global Media Insight (2024)

The above pie chart clearly shows the percentage of female and male users, where males are the majority but females are also using YouTube a lot. Although

women are lagging in other fields, as nowadays everyone uses smartphones and the internet is also easily available, women are ahead in this field. They involve themselves in new professions as content creators or influencers.

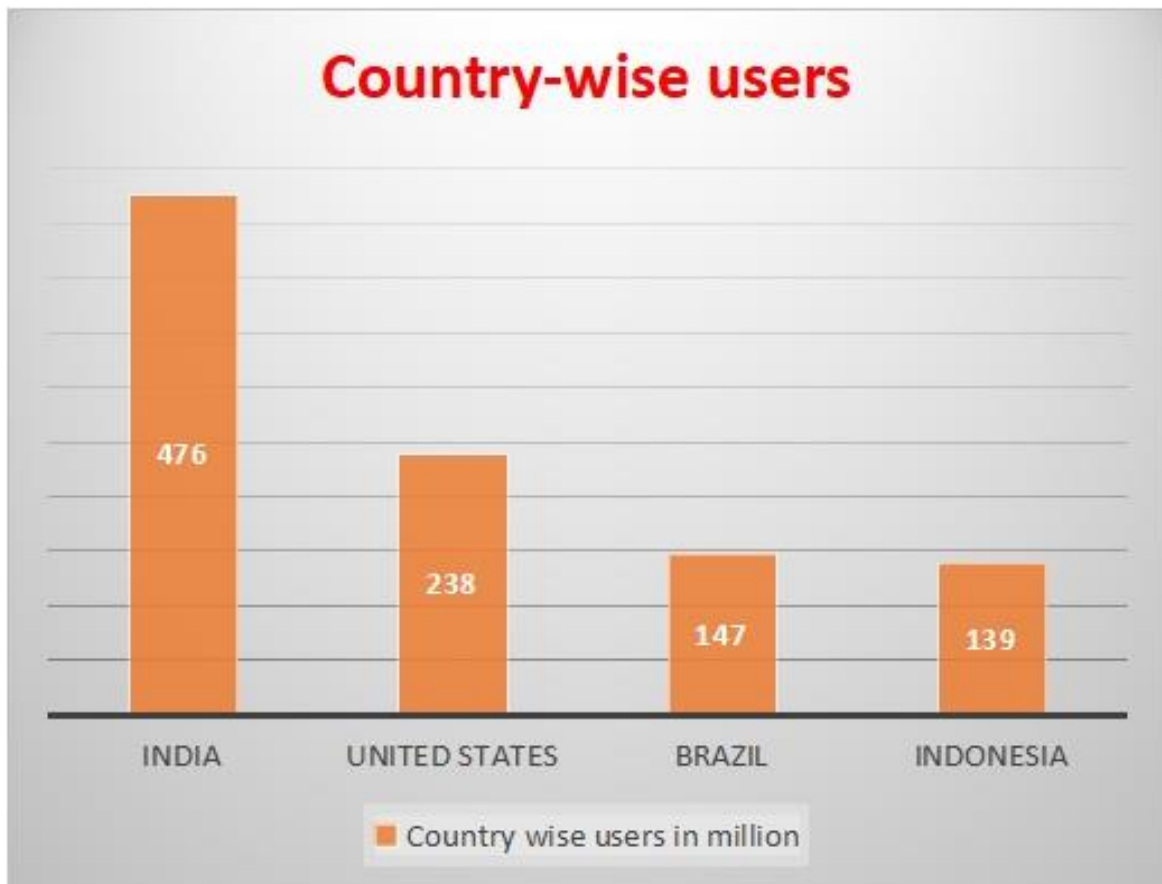


Figure 2 Country-wise users

Source: Global Media Insight (2024)

Figure 2 shows that India has the largest number of subscribers globally. USA, from where this platform started working has the second largest subscriber base. This study has highlighted the changing role of capitalism by using advanced technology. YouTube as a digital media platform has been promoted by transnational corporations to earn profits. It tries to build a consumeristic mindset and establishes a global culture. This study has deeply analyzed the impact of YouTube on Indian society because it has a footprint in the socio-economic and political sphere.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study has been done by reviewing various primary and secondary data. Some books and journal articles have been thoroughly studied to gain knowledge about the existing literature. These literatures provide a strong base for this study. The first article, which provides a theoretical foundation for this study, is 'Theorizing Globalization,' written by Douglas Kellner. Here, the author talks about by what means globalization became a universal phenomenon in the 1990s, and through technological development, the capitalist class made more profit and created a 'network society', a term coined by Jan Van Dijk, and popularized by Manuel Castells. Douglas Kellner coined the term 'techno-capitalism' and emphasized upon democratic nature of globalization, so there is a complex interconnection between

capitalism and democracy. Globalization argues for an introducing market economy where capitalism plays a leading role. In the era of globalization, the role of the MNCs is very active and predominant (Nandy, 2022). Most of the media is controlled by the MNCs. However, the role of media has been important to change the society. Social media, later on, became important gradually in social change.

Postmodern thinker Arjun Appadurai in his famous book 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' challenges the traditional notion of globalization, which is unidirectional from the West to the rest. Here he mentioned five key ideas to prove his arguments. These are Ethnos capes, Mediascapes, Technoscapes, Finances capes, and Videoscopes. For this study, the researcher picked up three ideas, which need to be elaborate. The first one is Mediascapes, nowadays traditional platform like television as well as social media shapes the culture. But these cultures are not universal or unidirectional rather it fragmented and vary from region to region. The other ideas are Technoscapes and Finances capes these two are completely related to each other. They convey the capacity of technology to create a digital society where people interact in various ways and it's also created new opportunities besides inequality. Later one emphasizes capital flow and economic exchange. Appadurai said that it also destabilizes the local economy and this led to financial instability.

Jean Baudrillard discusses the concept of 'hyperreality' in the book 'Symbolic Exchange and Death'. He tries to understand how reality has been constructed by technology, media, and consumer culture, which are far behind the real experience. Manuel Castells in his well-known book 'The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture' analyses the role of informational and communication technology. He says in the 20th century networks transcended national boundaries, and information played a key role in production, unlike industrial capitalism. In a 'network society' manufacturing jobs shift to service-based jobs. M.R. Rahat and M. Hoque in their recently published book titled 'How social media Makes Us Cultural Consumers' (2023), in this digital age by which means people engage with social media to create a new cultural zone. This exposure transforms people into cultural consumers.

Earlier studies were focused on consumerism promoted by print media, television, and social media platforms in general. However, as capitalism is a dynamic concept, there is a need to do continuous research. There were no studies that specifically highlighted the role of YouTube in present society. For that logic, the researcher has taken YouTube as a unit of analysis.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study has provided the answers to some important questions, by which the readers can get an idea about the dynamics of capitalism.

1. How does Techno-capitalism shape the global economy?
2. How does globalization inculcate the values of democracy?
3. What kind of facilities does YouTube provide to attract its viewers?
4. How do capitalists use YouTube as a virtual industry to generate surplus value through promoting consumerism?

Nowadays YouTube is a popular platform for getting anything in a single search. So, this research represents YouTube as a knowledge industry. For this study, non-probability sampling has been chosen and under it, convenience sampling method has been selected. For giving the complete shape of this research quantitative data

have been collected. The content analysis method has been used to analyze the functions of YouTube. Various primary and secondary data are also being used, which help to build a foundation for this work.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DEFINING CONSUMERISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Consumerism is often discussed as an economic term, but it also carries socio-political dimensions. In the epoch of technological innovation, consumerism needs to be analyzed through various dimensions. According to Britannica's definition, consumerism means an individual spending money to purchase some goods and services, which contributes to economic growth. Capitalists have created this idea for their development. Through numerous artifices, capitalists try to convince people to buy more, and they too will benefit from the economic growth. But it does not always happen. In the pre-industrial age, people purchase goods to fulfill their basic needs but now it has become a luxury. Not only do capitalists bandwagon these things, but states also promote consumerism to maintain stability in the market. To prove this argument, one of the best examples would be, after the 2008 recession US President George W. Bush told American citizens to go shopping. (Caio Lage, 2022). After getting material goods people feel symbolic success, and they get self-fulfillment. (Todd, 2011). But the implicit nature of consumerism is 'an inner cage', which portrays an idealized image of the 'good life', and 'perfect beauty' (Passini, 2001). The idea of possessing these material goods creates anxiety in people, and they are always in fear of missing out. Because of technology people are becoming more and more entangled in complex webs. Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley said, "I am not who you think I am; I am not who I think I am; I am who I think you think I am". So, there is a phenomenon of defining ourselves by others in this new social media age. (Hoque, 2023).



Figure 3 Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" Theory

Source: Abraham Maslow's book "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943)

Liberal thinkers, e.g., John Locke, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and others define human nature as rational, and cooperative. But in the realist perspective E.H. Carr, H.J. Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and others said that individuals are more interested in fulfilling their interests rather than others. Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' theory shows how individuals are more interested in fulfilling their interests rather than others. His 'hierarchy of needs' theory shows how individuals try to satisfy their needs by crossing various steps (Figure 3).

The first is physiological needs, in this stage, people want to fulfill their basic requirements like food, shelter, clothing, biological needs, etc. After fulfilling these they think about security. For that, they made society and legal institutions. The third one is more related to human emotions and their interpersonal relationship. In the fourth stage, people more concentrate on self-respect, accomplishment, status, etc. The final stage or highest level according to Maslow is the realization of inner potential, and trying to reach the highest level. (McLeod, 2024). By this, we can understand how people become very materialistic after fulfilling their basic needs.

GLOBALIZATION AND DYNAMISM OF CAPITALISM

Globalization is a process through which countries become interdependent by exchanging goods, services, and information. Many countries irrespective of their ideology i.e. liberal democracy or socialism adopted this economic policy to enhance their growth after the 1990s. Postmodernist argues globalization strengthens global capitalist economics and diminishes the values of sovereignty. A new kind of global culture has emerged from the TNCs (Kellner S. B., 1991). Using advanced technology, globalization creates a 'network society' (Castells, 1996), and a "universalization of consumerism" (Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class and Global Politics: Deconstructing the Corporate*: 2002). Postmodern thinker Baudrillard says that humanity is nowhere in the modern ideas, and technology creates a new social environment. (Baudrillard, 1993). German philosopher Martin Heidegger also criticizes the effects of globalization as it is a "complete Europeanisation of the earth and man".

Prominent scholars like Adam Smith, Francis Fukuyama, and Milton Friedman are the custodians of capitalism, democracy, and individual freedom. Hence, globalization has positive and negative consequences. Marxian scholars criticize the economic determinism and exploitative nature of capitalism. Karl Marx predicted that capitalism is unlikely to collapse once it reaches the highest peak of its exploitation, it has been proven wrong because capitalism is a dynamic process, it continuously changes its nature to survive. The influence of capitalism lies not only in production, consumption, and distribution but also it so much imprint on the cultural, social, and political domain. (Kellner S. B., 1991; Appadurai, 1991; Noble, 2018). Globalization tries to maintain a balance and interconnection between capitalism and democracy, which means at the same time it empowers and disempowers individuals. In the following discussion, this research has tried to analyze the role of YouTube in empowering as well as disempowering the individual. Global social movements expanded due to the development of social media (Nandy, 2024).

FUNCTIONALS ASPECTS OF YOUTUBE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONSUMERISM

As mentioned earlier YouTube is the second largest digital media platform, it can influence viewers, commodify their engagement, and transmute their attention to valuable resources, which can be monetized. Now YouTube has a large number of audiences, and the numbers have been increasing over time.

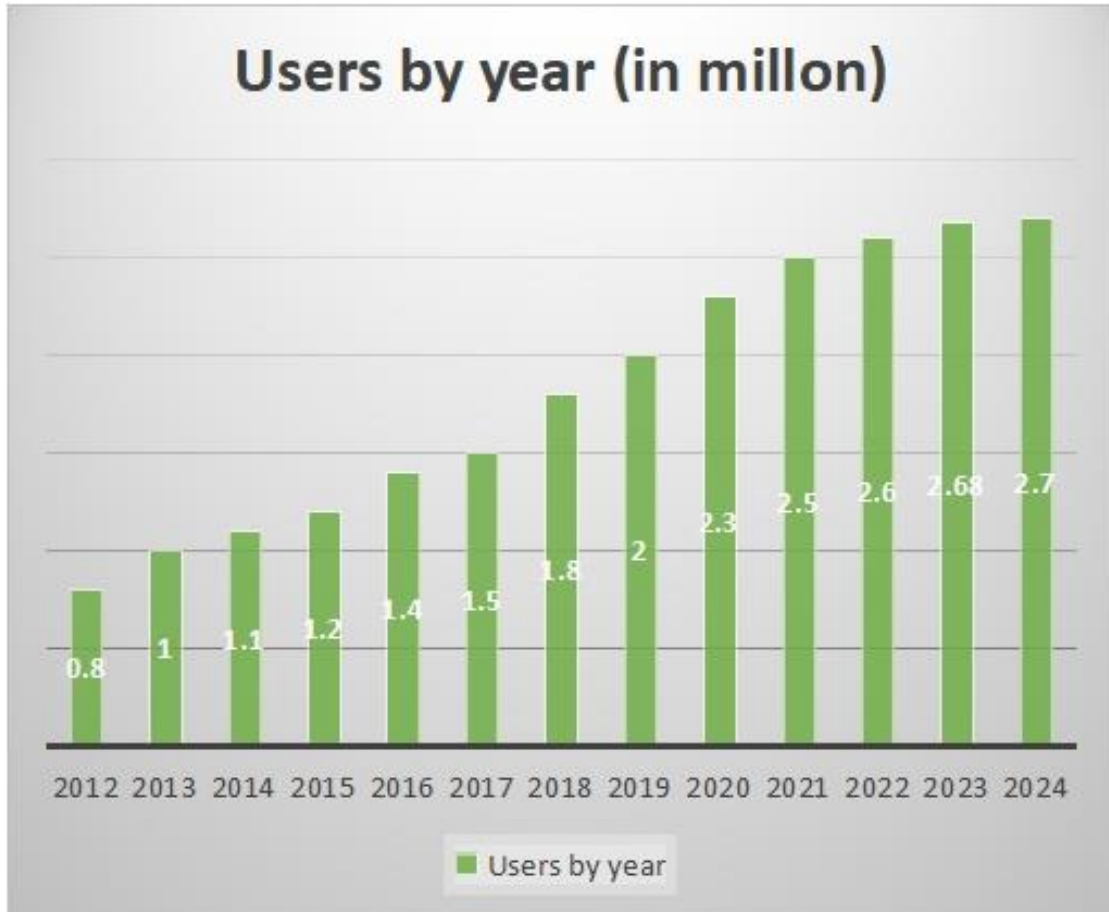


Figure 4. YouTube Users increasing by the year.

Source: Global Media Insight (2024)

No doubt capitalist is gaining so much profit from it, but YouTube has given a platform to their audience to exhibit their skills and make money from it. YouTube not only creates a large amount of audience but also encourages a new entrepreneurial spirit. It creates an alternative job market. In that way, this platform inculcates democratic values to give a chance to everyone to participate. In this competitive world attention of the people is treated as a scarce resource. YouTube has set some algorithms to hold people's attention e.g. most of the videos are between 15-20 minutes and YouTube tries to grab the attention of the audience by showing some interesting and eye-catching advertisements in between. It produces various types of videos like traveling vlogs, cooking, etc, under the categories of education, news, podcasts, gaming, and entertainment. Due to the development of technology, YouTube's database has been created in such a way that the content that people like the most is stored in its databases, and every time people use YouTube, the videos that they like are displayed in front of them, it is also called 'filter bubbles' (Unver, 2017). The most important thing is that YouTube

is updating itself with time because everyone cannot watch videos for a long so YouTube has launched the feature of short videos, which attracts people more. YouTube is promoting the consumeristic mindset well through in-video advertising and advertising by influencers or creators. The more time viewers spend on YouTube, the more advertising they will be exposed to, and by which content creators and YouTube both take advantage. YouTube has broken the norms that the customers are the passive recipients because now customers or viewers of this platform can also become producers. Through advertisement, sponsorship, and partnership they can also earn money. This participatory culture shifts the nature of capitalism. Influencers or we can say the content creatures play a crucial role in shaping the purchasing power of their subscribers.

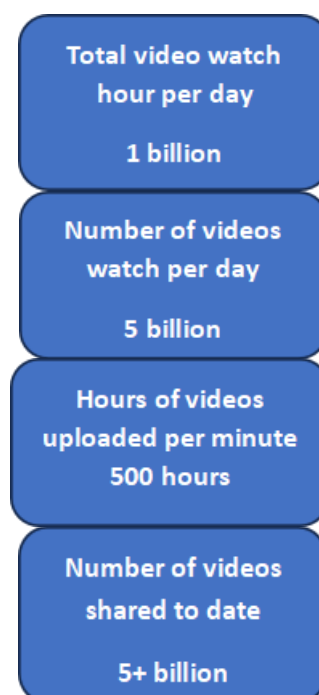


Figure 5. User Engagement

Source: Global Media Insight (2024)

Figure 5 show YouTube gets its revenue from advertisers and pays content creators a share amount. It is not an easy task to make content, it would be a challenging task for a creator to often create new content, to fulfill the changing needs of people.

Socio-economic and Political Aspects in the Indian Context

YouTube has been playing a positive role by fulfilling people's needs. By analyzing the following points, this study has critically discussed the role of YouTube in the Indian market, by promoting Indian creators to build its network.

Social aspects:

Nowadays every generation whether they are in Generation Z (age 07-22), millennials (age 23-38), generation X (age 39-54), or boomers (55-73) habituated to watching YouTube daily (Dimock, 2019). Things that were not usually available on the internet earlier are now easily presented by YouTube due to which people of all

age groups are influenced by YouTube. It covers everything from children's cartoons to movies, music, dramas, etc., in a single search. It has been used in developed countries since its inception, but in India, its impact has increased tremendously after the Covid-19 pandemic. After the 2020s educators and students have started using it as a teaching-learning platform. They are also using it in building their own business. In the case of India, some educational channels have subscribers to millions like Study IQ IAS (18.4 million), Physics Wallah- Alakh Pandey (13 million), Dhruv Rathee (5.9 million), BYJU'S (3.1 million), etc.

If talk about other channels like the T-series have the second-largest subscribers in the world and launch music and movie-related videos. These contents influence people. The number of subscribers shows how much people consume such content and it reflects on their behaviors and lifestyle. YouTube also helps to reduce the traditional beliefs of Indian society. This platform promotes Western channels because of their oceans of subscribers. Argumentum ad populum means popular opinion is that Western society is more liberal than Indian society. Omar and Ondimu (2024) argue about the impact of social media in contemporary society. Damota (2019) argues that social media often creates social anxiety.

Due to India's cheap internet price compared to other countries, people who belong to the grassroots level can earn through YouTube. Channels like Village Cooking Channels (26.6 million), and The Traditional Life (1.48 million) have millions of views in their channels because in India we get 1GB of internet data for Rs.20 to Rs.22 whereas in the USA it costs Rs.506.94. All these channels highlight the essence of Indian culture when our indigenous culture is being lost due to the incredible development of science and technology.

Despite its various positive aspects, its negative velocities are also thought-provoking. Channels like Carry Minati (44.6 million), Techno Gamerz (16 million), and Total Gaming (12 million) are hurting the young generation specifically Gen Zs, and millennials by using distorted language, and more visually appealing shows. Indian culture teaches love and respect for elders. In contrast, with this new social media platform the young generations are moving away from these things and it is directly visible in their behaviour. Such creators have been pushing the young generation away from civilized society to engage in uncivilized activities. Most of the young generations do not have mental stability and they forget where and what kind of words to talk about. They are forcing parents to buy such games and various instruments which are unnecessary even when parents cannot afford them. This creates unnecessary pressure on parents, but to some extent, parents are also responsible for that. After all the ultimate benefits accumulated by the capitalist class. The latent desires of this class have been possible to show by the decadence of BYJU, which tried to commodify education through eye-catching advertisements. Some beauty channels like Nirali Makeup Studio (47 million), Be Natural (7.86 million), Sper Style Tips (3.9 million), and channels run by celebrities e.g. Anushka Sen (2.97 million), Alia Bhatt (2.47 million), Kriti Sanon (1.27 million), and Nykaa (1.47 million), Lakme India (446 K) advertising beauty products, and commodify them. Through this, a wrong idea is created about the beauty of women. And they think they can only look beautiful by using expensive beauty products. By using these products, they face various physical problems. Many women feel mentally ill when they cannot afford to use all these expensive products. This creates "consumer-fetishism," a term coined by Karl Marx to explain consumerism beyond necessities, as a material need generated by capitalists. (Hoque, 2023).

Economic aspects:

According to the Oxford Economics Report (2022), YouTube contributed 16,000 crore Rs to India's GDP and supported 7.5 lakh jobs. It democratizes opportunities for creators as well as for viewers. There is no clear distinction between creators and viewers. It encourages new talents because they are direct beneficiaries of YouTube, there is no middleman between YouTube and the creators. As per this report in India, more than seven hundred thousand creators and partners received income from YouTube. Two-thirds of creators agreed that YouTube is the primary source of their income. There are instances where many creators have separately opened their offline business with the money they earned through YouTube, also they invested in their previous business as well. It also helps women to be empowered. A lot of women became content creators as a permanent job. YouTube has given them a platform to show their entrepreneurial skill and helps them to be financially stable. On November 8, 2024 news was published by the Times of India, the news mentioned Nisha Madhulika, a 65-year-old former teacher, and now she is a wealthy YouTuber in India, who has 14.5 million subscribers. Now she makes cooking videos. The most famous beauty channels are Nirali Makeup Studio (47 million), Be Natural (7.86 million), etc. The other popular channels are Nitu Bisht (30.3 million), Kabita Singh (14.1 million), Curly Tales (11 million), and Shruti Arjun Anand (10.2 million).

However, it has negative consequences too. Taking a YouTube channel to a position of earning is quite a difficult and time-consuming task. Even after taking it to that stage, there is no guarantee that the channel will remain stable. YouTube's algorithm creates pressure on creators to create new types of videos so that people have an interest in watching YouTube. There are countless examples in India as well as across the world where young people have dropped out of college to start a business on YouTube. But they failed to do that. Nowadays YouTube misguides laymen by promoting some channels like Dr. Vivek Bindra, who works as a motivational speaker, some courses have been sold by him, which are related to business ideas. But later it came to be known that it was fraud.

Political aspects:

Along with socio-economic contributions, YouTube also has political contributions. To start with a simple matter most of the political leaders of India be it the Prime Minister or the President have their official YouTube channel. Where videos are uploaded on various topics ranging from events they are participating in. Political parties and pressure groups are using this platform to spread propaganda. As we claimed earlier, the biggest example of YouTube promoting democratic values is the fact that people can directly listen to the speeches of leaders and make decisions about what is right and what is wrong. People can directly enjoy their democratic rights e.g. right to speech and expression through YouTube and movements like the farmers' movement to the R.G. Kar incident in Kolkata, West Bengal, have all been seen live through YouTube. By using this platform, it becomes very easy to gather public opinion and viewers can express their opinion through comments. Now we also watch Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha, and Supreme Court proceedings live. Through this, we can directly observe what is happening politically in our country. It is not only limited to the country, but the Bangladeshi student

movement and the recent 2024 US elections are all global events now at our fingertips, thus giving us an idea of how India should formulate its foreign policy and what it should do. We can get an idea about international affairs by observing the live proceedings of the SCO annual summit, G20 summit, and meeting on COP 29 as well as international organizations like UNO, IMF, and WHO's discussions. In the era of globalization, the role of media in the representation of social issues is very important, especially the representation of sensitive issues (Nandy, 2024 a). Social media should also be very careful in handling sensitive social issues.

Apart from protecting the democratic rights of the people, such platforms also serve to misinformation to the people. Criticizing the government and the policies of a democratic country makes it normal to maintain checks and balances within the country. But some channels only make such content, where they just reflect upon the negative side of government policies. These are not good for one's people as well as there is a possibility of tarnishing one's country's image in other countries. Which is enough to spoil other country's relationship with India.

E. CONCLUSION

In a neoliberal economy, YouTube plays a pivotal and complex role in promoting capitalism to build a consumeristic mindset and also provide a platform for content creators to exhibit their skills and earn through it. YouTube has the dual force of democratization and resistance. It gives a stage to raise alternative voices against the status quo as well as exploit viewer through algorithm control and commodification of their attention. Capitalism has been evolving through technological advancement and platforms like YouTube have been continue shaping the global culture. This paper tries to discuss YouTube's functions as a knowledge industry and also as a 'cultural echo chamber' (Hoque, 2023). Influencers or creators also use other platforms like Instagram, and Facebook to create their fan pages and that helps them to increase subscribers on YouTube. It is not wrong to quote 'It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' (Fisher, *Capitalism Realism: Is There No Alternative?* 2009).

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