
Exploration of Youtuber Business Models as an Additional Reference for Current Professional Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: youtuber; work; economics.

This research explores the opportunities for YouTubers' digital workers today. The existence of opportunities to earn income from the YouTube platform in the form of AdSense, as well as other income opportunities that are open because of being a YouTuber makes people want to engage in this digital worker. Either as a side job or as a main job. No research explores the current YouTuber business model, making this research important to be used as an additional reference for those who want to become YouTubers. This research applies a qualitative method whose goal is to explore information in depth. With in-depth interviews with 2 big YouTubers and 2 beginner YouTubers as well as Employees of the Directorate General of Taxes, the author found that currently, the work of YouTubers is not as prospective as it used to be, because the competition between YouTubers is very tight, and the regulations imposed by YouTube related to AdSense are also felt by informants. In conclusion, to start a career as a content creator on YouTube, and then make it your main income for now seems less recommended. Apart from the fact that there are many YouTubers, it means that the red ocean or competition is saturated, also the adsense received turns out to be "change", to collect just 100 dollars can be a year as experienced by Susanto who currently has 18.8 thousand subscribers.



Introduction

This research discusses YouTube social media as an arena for career opportunities for content creators in the digital era, not only as a main job but also as a side job. Currently 1 in 4 people are content creators, the potential in this industry in 2023 alone will reach 7 trillion and will increase 5 times in 2027 as digital platforms develop. (Sunariyah, 2022).

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The aspiration to become a YouTuber as a side hustle has indeed seen a significant increase in popularity, especially among the younger age group. Burgess, J., & Green (2018) and Abidin (2018) Noting that the appeal of creative freedom, flexible work schedules, a desire to express oneself, and the possibility of monetization through online content creation, have attracted a diverse range of individuals to pursue careers as digital workers, with YouTubers being a prime example.

In addition to revenue from content monetization, YouTube's national digital intermediary platform unlocks other significant revenue potential from advertising, sponsorships, and merchandise sales. (Hou, 2019). Boerman & van Reijmersdal (2020) Stated that YouTubers are considered to be fun and inspirational figures. This perception makes YouTubers an attractive spokesperson for advertisers, who leverage their popularity and influence to reach their target audience effectively. Thus, becoming a YouTuber not only provides earning opportunities but also improves one's social status and self-image in the surrounding environment. (Abidin, 2018).

Writer Cunningham, S., & Craig (2017) It also found that high earning potential is the main attraction for the younger generation to make digital work a career or side job.

Ironically, in Indonesia, the majority of young people today, especially Generation Z, are unemployed. This is due to the mismatch between available jobs and undergraduate expertise. There is also a work-life balance trend that makes them choose to remain unemployed until a job that is considered worthy emerges. (Puspaningtyas, Lida. Wulandhari, 2023).

Before YouTube, many permanent/office workers did side jobs selling goods or services from their respective skills outside of working hours. But after the existence of YouTube, another opportunity that can be used as a side job is very good. An example occurs with the two content creators that will be discussed in this article.

Regarding previous research, there are writings from Zahrah (2024) Entitled *Vlogger And Brand Credibility Perception: A Systematic Literature Review Of Endorsement Effectiveness*, this study analyzes the effectiveness of endorsements on YouTube vlogs (video blogs) by assessing the perceived credibility of vloggers and brands. The research was conducted using a systematic literature review method, which resulted in the effectiveness of endorsements being closely related to the perception of vloggers' credibility and also having an impact on the endorsed products. Overall, understanding the effectiveness of endorsements on YouTube vlogs can help companies choose the right vloggers and achieve marketing success.

Then there is research from Yuanda & T. Ilham Saladin (2023) entitled *The Phenomenon of Youtubers as Jobs in The Modern Era (Case Study of Meranti Village Youtuber)*. The researcher wants to see how a new job emerges into the life of the community, especially the people of Meranti Village, the purpose of this study is to find out how the YouTube application can be used more in the realm of new jobs in the current modern era. This type of research is qualitative research, the subject of this research is YouTubers in Meranti Village, with the results of the study showing that the phenomenon of YouTubers as a job in the modern era that occurs in Meranti Village is due to an advancement of the times that continues to develop and to the efficiency of the

work done by them and can get a fairly decent and easy income to do the work. Researchers also looked at how they went about their daily lives from waking up early to starting content creation to editing videos at night. Researchers also see that becoming a YouTuber in Meranti Village not only provides a decent income but also requires patience and struggle to achieve success in the profession, because if not you will become a YouTuber fail, and not continue again.

Existing research lacks exploration regarding business models, profits, and economic losses that will be obtained by YouTubers. So the author fills the void by interviewing relevant informants.

The author interviewed Pandi, who managed to use YouTube as a side hustle. Pandi is the person behind the large YouTube account Sophisticated Kali which in 2023 successfully got a silver play button. Currently, the Sophisticated Kali YouTube account has 113,000 subscribers. Especially, the success of YouTube Sophisticated Kali, which focuses on reviewing this gadget, is run by its business process, almost without a team.

Starting a YouTube account in 2017, of course, Pandi has a lot of experience interacting with this platform. How the business model is run, and what strategies are used so that they can profit in the midst of their busyness as permanent workers, of course, will be interesting to explore.

For the example of the two young men from Magelang, the author enriches the findings of facts that have not been explored from Pandi, especially related to its economic and social impacts. The owner of the YouTube account Denias Susanto is nicknamed an elderly content creator in Magelang because he has been active in creating content for a long time, especially related to travel and tourism content. Currently, his YouTube account has 18.8 thousand subscribers. A permanent worker in an office started by becoming an assistant to another content creator in 2012, Susanto was serious about developing his own YouTube account in 2021. As a result, currently, the videos are often used by other content creators, even national private TV uses the content several times. Even though the subscribers are only 18 thousand, income opportunities from other business models due to being content creators have been opened.

Then, the author tries to dig up information from full-time digital workers. The author explores two people who make digital work their main job. First, there is YouTuber Gamerbonk as well as the person behind the <https://diorama.suaramerdeka.com/> website. Second, the author also explores YouTuber @babalilitata who started his YouTube 8 years ago, and currently, @babalilitata has 20 workers to produce his YouTube content.

Finally, the author asked two employees of the Directorate General of Taxes to discuss the tax obligations of this YouTuber, so as to find clarity on whether this YouTuber's business model is still profitable to be used as a side job or even a main job. The author also presents the twists and turns of becoming a YouTuber.

Method

This research applies a qualitative method whose goal is to dig up information in depth, open to various responses. (Handoko, Y., Wijaya, H. A., & Lestari, 2024). In this case, the author digs out informants from experienced YouTubers. The data collection technique was carried out by in-depth interviews. Ida (2014) Explain that in-depth interviews are conducted to find out, or conduct a more in-depth investigation about a particular topic or issue. In this case, in-depth interviews related to the habits of YouTubers who make it a side job and YouTubers and digital workers as the main job.

The methods used in collecting data in this paper are interviews via telephone, Zoom, and observation of the YouTube accounts of each informant. The author also complements his findings with his own experience as a YouTuber since 2021.

Results and Discussion

Business Model and Source of Income

The Sophisticated Kali YouTube account focuses on discussing tech reviewers, including unboxing, reviewing, and versus gadgets. Sophisticated Kali's first video is a video of unboxing a OnePlus cellphone/cellphone borrowed from his office mate. Then in the next videos, Pandi buys his gadgets. One of the videos that made his account known to many people was the reverse video Samsung M10 vs A10. This video became a turning point where subscribers rose sharply, small endorsements began to come in, and began to routinely receive AdSense.

Currently, the business model of Sophisticated Kali is to follow the launch of a new cellphone every month, order it online, and after the cellphone is received, it will be used for testing for 3 days while preparing a video script to be made. Then the Sophisticated Kali account will upload related videos once a week.

Then cellphones and gadgets that have been reviewed will be sold to their online stores on the Tokopedia marketplace, with <https://www.tokopedia.com/canggihkali> link addresses, which are certainly below the market price.

For the business process to run smoothly, the used review gadget must be sold immediately, and later the money from the sale will be used to buy the latest cellphone again. To realize this, Pandi often advertises his ex-review products on other social media, namely Whatsapp and Instagram. YouTube Sophisticated Kali's current source of income apart from AdSense, and endorsements, there is also a fee from affiliate links that are promoted in the video and written in the video description. However, according to him, the fee from this affiliate link is the smallest income when compared to AdSense and endorsements.

There are currently two methods of endorsements received by Sophisticated Kali, the first is product seeding, which is giving products to influencers for free whose purpose is to be reviewed in more detail. This first method is always carried out by HP China Infinix, Tecno, and Itel who have routinely collaborated with Sophisticated Kali. The second method is that the product that has been reviewed will be returned, and then the influencer is given a fee for the review video that has been made. This second method is always used by Samsung and Oppo. Gadget companies other than HP always

carry out product seeding methods such as smart watches, speakers, power banks, gimbals, and earphones.

Of the 6 revenue options offered by YouTube, Sophisticated Kali only activates, watch page ads, short feed ads, and Super Thanks.

Super Thanks is revenue from viewers who want to show more gratitude for their creator's content videos. Pandi stated that he had never gotten anything from this super thanks. The author thinks that Indonesian audiences should not give money for the content that has been created, appreciating through comments is sometimes difficult for Indonesian netizens.

Super thanks himself, YouTube the author once got it from the audience, which later in the YouTube Studio display will look like in this picture 2. If you look at the picture, the audience gave a super thanks of Rp 150,000 but what the content creator received and appeared on YouTube Studio was Rp 103,614, there was a deduction of around Rp 46,386 or 31% by YouTube.

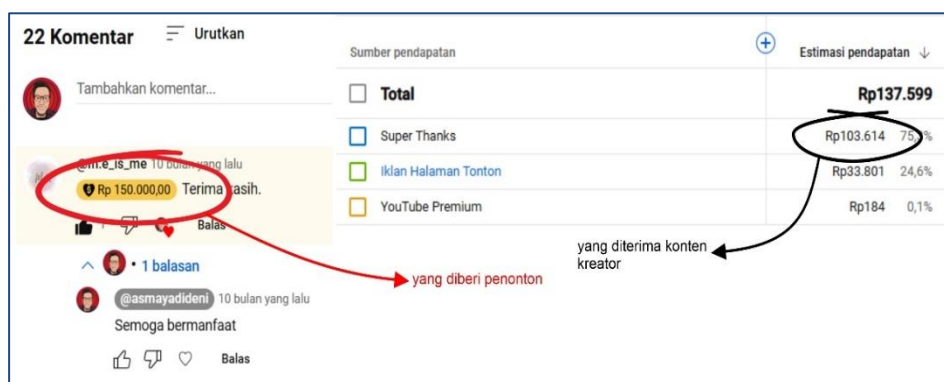


Figure 1
Report from the content entitled How to Create a Podcast via Podcasters on Spotify on Deni Asmayadi's YouTube account

Apart from YouTube, in March 2024 @TikTokofficialindonesia sent an Instagram message to Sophisticated Kali, which contained an invitation to become its content creator. Sophisticated Kali was asked to make 7 videos for one month, in exchange for 300 dollars in the form of vouchers, and 95 dollars could be disbursed. Pandi used the voucher to advertise his video, and the result was only 3 videos uploaded on TikTok, Sophisticated Kali has gained 9000 followers. Then for the 95 dollars, TikTok will disburse it to Pandi's account on May 16, 2024.

According to Pandi, TikTok's requirement for "hijacking" YouTubers to become content creators is that the number of subscribers on YouTube is at least 10,000, and is considered potential by TikTok. YouTube itself, according to Pandi, has often conducted satisfaction surveys for its content creators, and when viewed from the questions asked, it seems to show concerns that YouTube is abandoned by its content creators.

Interestingly, Sophisticated this time is not only glanced at by TikTok but also online/slot gambling companies. Pandi said that this slot dared to pay a higher fee than a

"legal" brand when endorsing. But Pandi always refuses to collaborate with this "illegal" brand or product, because Pandi tries to be a virtuous and enlightened content creator with his content.

Meanwhile, the business model of Susanto's YouTube account is to create a matrix containing potential locations for sightseeing in various regions, which are then made a schedule to visit. Similar to Sophisticated Kali, Susanto also did it himself. Susanto will take a lot of video footage at the location to be used as stock, which will later be edited and then paid in installments when uploading it. The usual upload pattern is 10 times uploading short videos, followed by 1 long video upload in one week.

The quality of the videos recorded by Susanto is considered very good, proven to have been used by more than 50 videos by other content creators, including television. Some of them have permission first, and some have not. Everything was detected by YouTube and reported to Susanto, but Susanto preferred to keep it quiet. This results in content containing footage originating from Susanto having red dollar status (no AdSense).

Susanto admitted that the AdSense received was not enough to cover the cost of his travels, so he often used personal money. Since her account monetized at the end of 2022, Susanto has only withdrawn her AdSense 3 times, meaning that she has only collected about 300 dollars. Susanto also said that the estimated number of AdSense receipts published by socialblade.com was very far off. However, Susanto does not mind that, because there have been many offers of endorsements for tourist attractions or restaurants that ask Susanto to visit him.

The social and economic impact of Susanto's content is to change the location of the "hidden gem" which was initially quiet to crowded. His content has had an impact like this twice, the first time when he strayed to Sukomakmur Magelang, and he decided to record it, the second time at Propane Range Pancaarga Magelang. According to his confession, there was a little regret when he went viral with the location because currently there are many buildings that are not clear, and it is difficult to park, so it is difficult to get peace of mind/healing in that place. Although it may be felt that it has a positive impact on residents because they can sell, and others.

Then his YouTube account Gamerbonk, this informant has been in the world of content creators for a long time even before YouTube was popular. In the past, the informant started as a content creator of the website of a large company Game Media Asia, namely <https://gamebrott.com>, then he resigned and decided to create his website with his team in collaboration with the newspaper media company Suara Merdeka. Starting last year, the informant decided to become a gamer YouTuber as his side job. Currently, the subscribers are only 1.4 thousand, and YouTube's business model is to research to determine what games to review, then produce by recording the screen while playing the game, then making a script, and finally uploading the content once a week on Saturday night.

This informant had said that this YouTube AdSense has always been of little value, especially for those who watch Indonesians. This informant's remarks reminded the author that indeed the CPM (cost per thousand impressions/cost per thousand

impressions paid by advertisers) in each country is different. This is also in line with Pandi's statement that in the past before YouTube placed ads on all videos (including to accounts that were not partners), and before TikTok was as big as it is today, AdSense revenue was felt to be very large, but now it is felt to be declining.

Susanto also said the same thing, she often gets suspicions from her friends that she gets a lot of money from AdSense, when in fact what she gets from AdSense is a "dime".

The above statements also remind the author of the statements of many old YouTubers who mentioned that YouTubers who are just starting today are more difficult than those who have started their YouTube in the past, one of which is related to the amount of AdSense (because the YouTubers themselves have increased, then the platform for advertisers has also increased). Aligned with research Yuanda & T. Ilham Saladin (2023) Which states that the digital content industry, including YouTube today, is highly competitive. Some YouTubers may have a hard time competing with other popular content that already has a large fan base.

Target Consumers and Strategies

Pandi seriously read the results of the analysis on the YouTube Studio account of Sophisticated Kali and concluded that the audience is mostly from the lower middle class, people who are looking for cheap cell phones with the best specifications.

It is also supported by the habit of Sophisticated Kali getting high engagement from videos when reviewing cellphones under 3 million. On the other hand, when Pandi reviewed cell phones from endorsements that cost more than 3 million, the video results had low engagement, few comments, and a small number of viewers.

Of the three video themes that Sophisticated Kali often brings (unboxing, review, and versus), indeed the versus theme is the most crowded. Prior to 2020 content versus very little was discussed, mostly unboxing and review videos. However, after 2020, a lot of versus content has started.

The difference between Sophisticated Kali and other similar accounts is the characteristic of Pandi who does not want to show the face of his host. Then Pandi also strategizes to provide the most complete gadget information possible when reviewing, which even other accounts have never discussed and occasionally holds a giveaway. Here is Pandi's statement regarding this: "I was there trying to make the most complete information, at the end that is what makes people like my channel, because I see many comments saying "Wow, on other channels, this has never been discussed but on this channel, it is discussed". Even compared to GadgetIn, "wow, in GadgetIn it has never been discussed, here it is discussed in these parts" (Interview, April 6, 2024).

Meanwhile, Susanto's target audience is those who need a reference to the location of cheap or paid roads. Regarding his strategy, Susanto revealed that he often visits the locations of roads that have not been raised by many YouTubers.

Meanwhile, Gamerbonk targets uploading videos once a week, with its target audience of people who like video games. In addition, Gamerbonk wants to develop his YouTube organically and use original videos, not other people's videos or reuploads,

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even using AI. Gamerbonk added that to develop on YouTube, research is needed and cannot be instant unless you want to go through the black road.

The sentence "black road" spoken by Gamerbonk reminds the author of the Whatsapp groups that the author follows, including Whatsapp groups that offer services to increase airtime, and increase subscribers.

As can be seen in picture 3 below, the Whatsapp XXX Store Branch group has 11 groups, and the ones that the author follows are in group 3 and group 11, the content is 73 and 62 people, respectively. The author once asked how much it cost to increase 700 hours of airtime because at that time the position of the author's YouTube account had reached 1,000 subscribers but the airtime was only 3,300 hours of airtime. The price it offers is IDR 500,000 to increase 700 hours of airtime.

Businesses like this in the Whatsapp group also have many scammers, for example, the one on the left in picture 3, offers a much cheaper price, 1000 hours of airtime is only Rp 50,000.

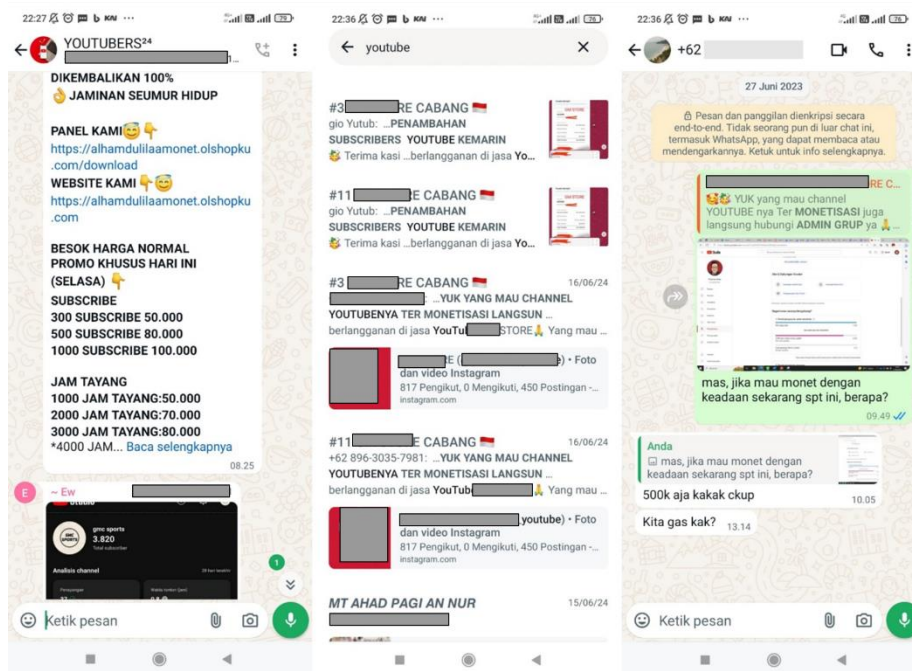


Figure 2
Business screenshots increase YouTube watch hours and subscribers
Source: Screenshot of Whatsapp Author

The author knows it's a scam because in that group there are also transactions to buy and sell YouTube accounts that have been monetized, as shown in figure 4 next to this.

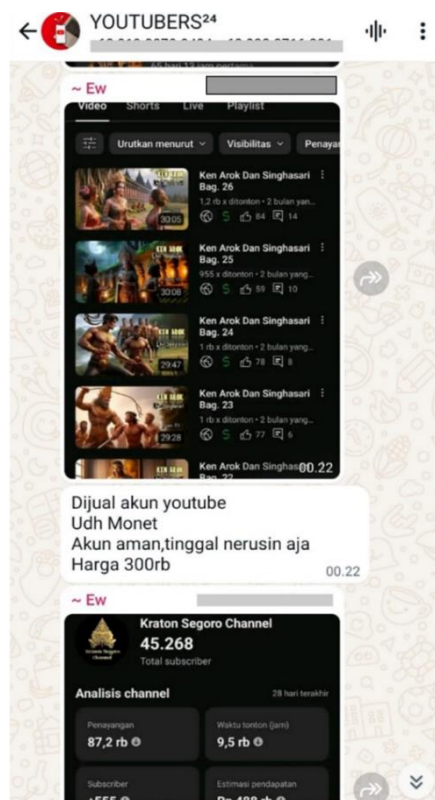


Figure 4
YouTube Account Offers

The person offers a very cheap price for a YouTube account with 45,268 subscribers for only Rp. 300,000. The writer had become a victim because he was tempted by the very cheap price. But after the author transferred, the seller asked for money again under the pretext that his YouTube account already had a sense of hundreds of thousands. When transferred again, the seller will have another reason to ask for additional money, until 1.3 million sellers do not also send their email password and adsense pin envelope.

Working Routine and Condition

For a large YouTube account such as Sophisticated Kali, the routine of his activities every week is not too heavy for Pandi, because there is already a pattern and there is an economic motivation, namely adsense, endorsement, and a fairly large affiliate fee.

Meanwhile, for Susanto's YouTube account, let alone Gamerbonk, where the AdSense received has not been large and has never even received AdSense if the motivation is only economic, then his weekly routine will feel very heavy.

It is interesting what Susanto said as follows: "I like to create, I like to immortalize, I like to document, I like to be a memento, to make something" (Interview, May 25, 2024).

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The author has mentioned in the introduction that the motive for becoming a content creator is to provide opportunities for permanent workers to express themselves and channel their creativity outside of their daily routine work (Abidin, 2018). Susanto is one of the people who is motivated to carry out his routine in content not because of economics (AdSense).

For working conditions, the author got information from those who make digital work a full-time job, namely from Gamerbonk and Chitra, the owner of YouTube @babalilitata.

Gamerbonk said that currently in his main digital job with his team, which is managing the website, <https://diorama.suaramerdeka.com/> his monthly income is uncertain. Therefore, Gamerbonk last year started playing YouTube, with the hope, effort, and consistency that he does YouTube could provide additional income.

As a digital worker on the Gamerbonk website, every day I have to write 5-8 articles on the diorama website. Even Gamerbonk had a message to the writer, as below: "Depending on how much you get, the name is also uncertain, in my personal opinion if you want to be like that (become a website content creator), my advice is not to be lazy if you don't have a team, especially those who don't want to work, especially if you are lazy, you will be thrown away because if you don't fill in (write) every day, at least 6 days a week (you have to keep writing)".

It is inversely proportional to Chitra, the owner of the YouTube account @babalilitata which already has 12.9 million subscribers. The working conditions as a YouTuber have all positive impressions. Starting from the adaptation that continues to be carried out when there is a change in regulations from YouTube, then related to the workforce in the studio, where 20 employees are in the company, while 10 additional outsourced employees to work on the audio, even until now @babalilitata have been able to enter toy brands, sell character dolls, brand cabinets, and most recently they collaborated with Wimcycle bicycles. Including tax matters, Chitra acknowledged that they are among those who are very tax-compliant.

Regulation

Regarding regulations, the author explores taxation by asking the two employees as stated in the introduction, then completes the data with related news on the online portal.

In summary, in 2021 the Task Force for Handling Digital Economy Actors was formed by the Directorate General of Taxation, which has two main tasks, namely appointing trade actors through the electronic system (PMSE) and monitoring the activities of influencers, including YouTubers. The trick is to utilize the internal and external data of the tax office. The Directorate General of Taxes will collaborate with other Ministries/Institutions to search for third-party data.

One of the speakers doubted whether this YouTube third party must provide its YouTuber data to be used as a potential tax. It is not necessarily that YouTube wants to give it when the Directorate General of Taxes asks for it because it considers the P3B (Double Tax Avoidance Agreement) regulation. The following is the statement of the

informant related to this: "YouTube is foreign, he gives income to Indonesian citizens, right, it can indeed be a double tax" (Interview, June 5, 2024).

This is reminiscent of Chitra's statement that her YouTube has been taxed twice, in addition to American taxes as well as Indonesian taxes. But currently, the finance department is taking care of not being taxed for America because it should be paid for by its own YouTube platform, not by the content creator.

Mahadi (2021) wrote that the Directorate General of Taxes will also dig deeper into the information data of digital economy actors by holding a one-on-one meeting with a third party. The author tried to find a continuation of this related news but stopped in 2021, there is no more online news regarding the results of this one-on-one meeting.

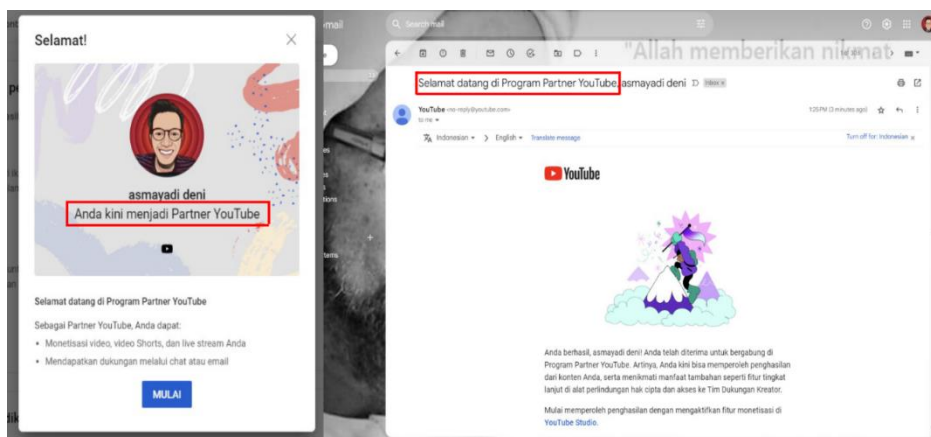
The resource person added that for the model in Indonesia that adheres to self-assessment in calculating the amount of tax, tax education is important, but more importantly, about morality, will taxpayers voluntarily report their tax obligations? By nature, they will avoid it. Especially now that public distrust of the government is high. Another resource person added that because tax reporting is voluntary, many YouTubers do not report their tax obligations. Unless YouTubers are already big (such as *babalilitata*), they will be detected by their tax offices.

Susanto admitted that he had received a notification on YouTube Studio that contained an appeal to report his tax obligations, and it only happened once from the beginning of his monetization or becoming a partner of YouTube.

Pandi and Susanto, when asked by the writer about the regulation of content creators in Indonesia, admitted that they did not know anything. They only follow what is regulated by the platform, and believe that YouTube is already following what is regulated by the Indonesian government. The following is Pandi's statement related to this: "Yes, mas, because actually, we are partners with YouTube, we are their partners, so we share the profits, YouTube is 45%, we are 55% of the ads. I'm sure YouTube has taken effect, Adilah is like that" (Interview, April 6, 2024).

The discursive strategy of partner labels has indeed been implanted by YouTube since the beginning of monetizing creator content as seen in Figure 5 below, and this seems to be working, as is the case with the article by Rahayu, (2022) who said that Ojol drivers (as other digital workers) did not want to demo May Day because they felt that they were not workers, but partners.

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Gambar 5
Penvebutan Partner pada saat pertama kali monetisasi di akun YouTube

Then the author also asked Gamerbonk about the condition of digital workers in Indonesia in front of YouTube, and the answer was interesting from a person with experience working digitally: "In terms of industry, 'what can I do' because it's rich in the system. Partners work on their own and just share the profits with YouTube. The problem is that those whose term has provided facilities for it. But for YouTube or Google, they have also given a 'solution' with a member program (it's just that unfortunately, this has to be 1k subscribers first, the same total of certain hours), so they can get a term 'tip' from subscribers to help creators. Later, if there are new achievements, they can open a digital store as well as sell merchandise. Even if those who watch it are kind, because on the internet, especially in certain communities, 80-90% prefer to criticize the work of people rather than encourage or give advice" (Interview, May 26, 2024).

Globalization affects YouTube

The YouTube platform is affected by global conditions, as exemplified by the one that has been explained in the previous section, where YouTube currently often conducts satisfaction surveys to its potential content creators so that they do not leave YouTube. This is because TikTok, which is also a global company, is too militant to "seduce" content creators to work on its platform.

Then the existence of short videos on YouTube is affected by Instagram reels and also TikTok, which has a 9:16 format / vertical video. Then the policy of the amount of adsense received by YouTubers becomes smaller because the advertising "cake" has been divided into other platforms.

Lastly, this is complained about by all YouTuber sources in this article, namely copyright issues. YouTube often troubles its YouTubers because of the problem of the background used. The status changed from initially free copyright to then being struck because it was claimed that there was copyright by a certain party after the video aired, it was very tiring because not all YouTubers have the energy like Pandi and Chitra to

dispute the copyright issue of background. Pandi admitted that he always disputes cases like this, and usually always wins.

Conclusion

Various business models profited on YouTube, including the main one from AdSense. In addition to AdSense, there is also income from endorsements and affiliate fees. A big YouTuber like @babalilitata can already sell his brand because it is so big and has many subscribers.

To start a career as a content creator on YouTube, and then make it your main income for now seems less recommended. Apart from the fact that there are many YouTubers, it means that the red ocean or competition is saturated, also the adsense received turns out to be "change", to collect just 100 dollars can be a year as experienced by Susanto who currently has 18.8 thousand subscribers. Especially if there are no special skills that can be sold, that can make the content interesting, and different from the existing ones, it seems that other digital fields can be said to be more promising, for example learning digital marketing for online sales.

Sophisticated Kali and babalilitata tasted the sweet fruit because they started their careers in 2017 and 2016 when there were still few content creators, there were still a lot of advertising "cakes", and YouTube's regulations were not too strict. In addition, they do have special skills and knowledge that can be sold, as well as extraordinary perseverance from the owners.

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