

2-2021

The Rise of the Social Media Influencer

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The Rise of the Social Media Influencer

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Date: February 2, 2021

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the University Honors Scholar designation
at Johnson & Wales University

Abstract

Being a social media influencer isn't something you can just audition or interview for, which leaves many people confused on how to become one. According to MediaKix, being an influencer on YouTube is becoming a popular career goal for younger kids ("Why 75%"). It seems that many people today look to YouTube for entertainment and to help them escape the reality of life. It gives people the chance to find someone, an influencer that they can relate to or feel like they are friends with. The history of social influencers and how they are useful to brands when advertising their products to consumers is important in grasping the meaning of influencers today. To comprehend how influencers on YouTube make money, it begins with understanding the features on the platform like AdSense and video monetization. To better understand how people become influencers, I conducted a case study looking into the lives of four popular YouTube creators. It seems that many of the biggest creators on the platform had no media presence beforehand and essentially built their fanbase from the ground up. This study also showcases their growth as they branch into other projects outside of social media. The focus of this thesis will be to explain how creators on YouTube have become influencers and how this has become a financially successful career path.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to show my appreciation for Professor Eileen Medeiros who helped guide me to find the topic for my paper. She helped me to find one that I was passionate about and had never been done before. I also want to thank her for helping me to find a method that was best fit for the topic.

I would also like to thank Professor Johanna Church, who has been my advisor through the development of this paper. Even with everything that was going on this year, I could depend on her feedback and quick responses to guide me in the right direction. I'm happy to have had her on my team, even though the production of this paper took longer than I hoped.

Lastly, I'd like to say how grateful I am to Dr. Wendy Wagner, who has taken time aside to give me detailed feedback and suggestions on how to make the paper the best it can be. I truly thank you for your help and your patience through this process.

For the reader, I want you to know that the efforts in this paper wouldn't have been possible without this team of people helping me through it all.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	5
Celebrity and the Social Media Influencer	7
The Business Relationship between YouTube and the Creators	11
Methodology	17
Case Studies	17
Shane Dawson	17
Liza Koshy	24
Ryan Kaji	30
David Dobrik	34
Findings	42
Conclusions	44
Works Cited	46

Introduction

The internet has accelerated the spread of vast amounts of information and content due to its ease of access. For many years, broadcast network and cable television were extremely popular, but now, in the 2010s, a lot of people have migrated to streaming services like Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney Plus. The stars in these shows are really established actors and actresses who have developed a name for themselves over the years through their talent. Despite the popularity of these platforms and their content, younger generations seem to be more drawn to YouTube. YouTube, which launched in February of 2005, started as a place to share media clips or funny viral videos but has now grown to be so much more. Many people would say one of the first viral videos they've ever watched was "Charlie Bit My Finger" because according to StyleCaster, it is the number one most viewed viral video on the platform (Garnsworthy). After being on YouTube for over a decade, the 56-seconds-long video has amassed over 875 million views. However, over the years, YouTube has expanded beyond just sharing viral videos. Today, it is a platform for those who want to create a steady stream of content on a scheduled basis operating along the lines of a "work from home" situation. Just like TV networks, there are different types of YouTube channels offering entertainment based on the various categories that have developed over the years. For example, beauty is a popular category where influencers create content by showcasing their incredible makeup skills in a variety of different ways. There is content for everyone due to the rise in influencers as more people turn this into their career. It would be helpful to understand how these ordinary people rose to become influencers and esteemed members of the social media community.

A huge part of the success of social media influencers are the viewers, or fans. According to a study done by Hootsuite, people between the age of 18 and 34 prefer to watch videos on

YouTube over any other platform that has ads (Cooper). Younger generations' attachment to YouTube seems to be a direct way for some of them to relieve stress. As stated in a publication on Medium, watching YouTube videos allows for them to decompress and help them to escape from reality (Manifest). The fact that influencers are being watched by people so close to their own age may be the reason why they seem to resonate well with their audience. YouTubers come across as open and friendly, which is why some viewers feel as if they are friends with them. Since most influencers started off as regular people having no connection to the media, they tend to be really grateful to their fans for getting them to where they are. In appreciation, influencers may plan to go on tour where they can do meet and greets to get the chance to see their fans in person. Even though the influencers don't bring traditional talent to the stage, fans still buy out some of the biggest venues just to get a chance to see or take pictures with them. YouTube influencers have become a big part of the lives of their fans and these events give them a chance. Events like Vidcon and Playlist Live offer the chance for fans to meet their favorite influencers all gathered in one place, where fans pay to sit at panels, go to concerts, and roam around the venue taking pictures with any influencer they run into.

The large following that some influencers have accumulated has led to many opportunities for them outside of YouTube. Even with opportunities like working for a big company like Vogue, influencers are still working toward building a name for themselves outside of their YouTube channel. Influencers have the relatability of a friend with the following of a well-established celebrity. This might be why it has turned into a dream job for this new generation of kids. According to MediaKix, 1 in 3 kids in Generation Z aim to be a YouTube influencer, while only 1 in 6 want to be a movie star ("Why 75%"). However, being an influencer isn't exactly something that can be studied in school, so aspiring influencers have no

idea where to start. The purpose of this thesis is to seek the answers to the following questions: How are everyday people in society becoming influencers on social media platforms, starting with YouTube, without any previous media exposure? How has becoming famous changed due to the easy access of social media? This thesis will also examine how becoming an influencer has become a financially successful career path for many influencers.

Celebrity and the Social Media Influencer

Becoming a social media influencer has become increasingly popular in the last few years. An influencer is a person who has developed a large fanbase on social media through their content, and they seem to hold a significant impact over the purchasing decisions of their audience.

The concept of an influencer is still fairly new and not well understood by the public, so the best way to understand it is through the history of influencers. Before influencers were around, it was celebrities who were adored and beloved by the public. A celebrity was a complete stranger that people seemed to idolize for no reason other than their ability to take on a different persona. According to Turner, celebrities aren't known for achieving great things, but for having a personality that is much different than others. It seems that this all started when the motion picture industry began to market the "picture personality," which later became "the star." Back then, there weren't cast lists available for films, so actors were known as the character they played rather than for their own personal identity. Let's say some people have a favorite character from a popular movie, they have now become a fan of this person. People have pushed them to a celebrity status through the admiration of the character or role they played. It's as Daniel Boorstin says, "the celebrity is a person who is well-known for their well-knownness."

Scholars who research celebrity say that it began with people in the film industry, but it doesn't really address the question of how celebrities are made in other industries.

Through the fame that celebrities hold, they have been given a platform which allows them the power to influence their audience. Adil Adnan, from Iqra National University, and Farzand Ali Jan, a doctor and professor at CECOS University, would research how celebrities play a role in business in "Relationship between Celebrity Endorsements & Consumer Purchase Intention." According to their methodology, they decided to take a deductive approach that would allow them to make conclusions based off statistics. Adnan and Jan have created several models testing their hypothesis, which is that there is a positive relationship between celebrity endorsements and consumers. Through this research, Adnan and Jan administered a study that revealed that film stars, drama actors, and athletes have a more appealing instinct than endorsers who aren't celebrities. It seems that this stems from celebrities being able to attract and retain the attention of the consumer, which could potentially have a positive impact on their purchase intention. It may be more expensive for brands to advertise using celebrities, but the payoff is well worth it for the business.

With the multiple media outlets available today, a person can become famous just by going viral on the internet. This sort of overnight fame can be due to the exceptionalism that the individual possesses. Their amazing level of skill and talent is widely recognized and amasses them a large fandom in no time. The chance of this happening is even more possible today due to social media being such a fast way of spreading information and content. For example, Shawn Mendes went viral after he posted a singing cover on Vine, and now he is playing sold out concerts at some of the biggest venues in the world. Becoming social media famous isn't as easy as it seems though, especially since it is out of one's control. In most cases people go viral

unexpectedly at the hands of people recognizing their talent and sharing it with others. Iris Mohr from St. John's University dives into how a person can acquire fame by going viral in "Going Viral: An Analysis of YouTube Videos." In this research, Mohr discusses the case of Susan Boyle, a woman in the UK who went viral after her audition on *Britain's Got Talent*. There were several videos posted of her and all of them were accumulating millions of views. This is important in recognizing that being a viral sensation can instantaneously make someone well-known or famous. However, building a fanbase is only the first step, now the person can either try to retain that audience or simply be a "one-hit wonder". The fact of the matter is that there is no direct path to creating a viral video or becoming famous overnight, it's just something that happens.

Similar to celebrities, influencers hold a great power of persuasion over their audience and their decisions. However, the two differ in that influencers have a connection with their audience that they've formed through their personality and/or skillset. Imagine having the power to influence a large group of people with just one post. Marcin Szczurski begins a discussion on how being an influencer has become a successful career in "Social Media Influencer: A Lifestyle or a Profession of the XXIst Century." In the article, Szczurski mentions that the relatability of influencers helps them to build a strong and long-term relationship with their audience. The opinions of an influencer are considered trustworthy, which is why businesses use them as a way of marketing. It may have started off as a lifestyle, but most influencers have moved over into treating it like a job. In summation, the research shows that influencers have developed a real fanbase with like-minded people, and this is why their thoughts and opinions are valued so highly.

It is important to know that people will only listen to influencers as long as they are regarded as authentic and honest. This is especially true for the beauty community since their audience looks to them for opinions on certain products and brands. It seems that “within the beauty community, pursuing fame, success and economic benefits for its own sake renders content creators as untrustworthy, and not transparent enough to ‘deserve’ fame” (García-Rapp). Some influencers are willing to compromise their authenticity by rating a product positively in return for money. For the beauty community, it is important for them to state that they are being paid to review an item, whether they end up liking it or not. A beauty guru named Bubz decided to turn down all offers from companies asking to endorse their products to make her channel as honest as possible. Even though, from a commercial standpoint, the influencers are losing out on a lot of money, it is worth it for them to maintain their integrity and audience.

Much of the research shows that the reason behind them being called social media influencers is due to the influential power they hold over their audience. To put it simply, people listen to them and businesses are willing to pay to use their voice. This can turn their active content on social media from just a lifestyle to a profession. Posts that were previously uploaded for their pleasure are now mixed with branded posts that are paid for by any company they choose to partner with. It supports the idea that social media has become more popular than most other outlets for entertainment. Due to this, the voices of influencers are just as powerful, if not more, than traditional celebrities. There is a lot information about how influencers can be paid to use their platform, but there isn't any regarding how influencers rise to fame, which is what will be shown in this paper.

The Business Relationship between YouTube and Creators

YouTube has played a major role in creating social media influencers, possibly due to the fact that it was one of the first social platforms. With YouTube, any person who creates content has the chance to become an influencer if they can build up a fanbase. These YouTube videos can be watched from anywhere in the world, so some have an audience similar to that of a celebrity.

YouTube has slowly grown into a big-time platform that started receiving an average of a billion views per day in 2009. In that same year, the company also partnered with Channel 4, which means that people could now find the video clips of the news on YouTube if they missed it live on television (Exford). Lastly, this was also the year when people began to use YouTube as a hobby in which they uploaded videos of them gaming or vlogging. YouTube has continued to expand and find new ways to broaden its platform. One of the things YouTube has added to their platform is a subscription service called YouTube Red, which is now known as YouTube Premium. YouTube Premium is a paid service that offers ad-free videos and music, downloadable content, and access to shows/movies created by YouTube called Originals. The service also offers the option to download videos of choice from the billions of hours of video content that have been uploaded to the platform. Another addition to the many things that are already offered is called YouTube TV. This service was launched in 2017 and allowed people to stream movies and shows, with the number of channels provided depending upon what region the account was registered in. The original shows created by YouTube would also be included in this subscription package. It offers networks like ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, and the list goes on. Lastly, YouTube can grant monetization to certain channels on the platform to be paid for uploading content. YouTube can be viewed on almost any platform: androids, iPhones, tablets,

Google Chromecast, Amazon Fire TV, Roku, Apple TV, and computers. This may be the reason why their views have grown so significantly.

On top of all the subscription programs that they offer, the platform can be easily accessible to people who want to create their own content. Some of the most popular people on the platform are content creators. These YouTube creators are essentially tasked with creating a steady stream of content on the platform for their viewers. To put it simply, YouTube Creators have become influencers. These creators are known as social media influencers because of their ability to build relationships with their audience. They are able to form connections with people through a screen, which may sound easy, but it takes an entertaining and friendly person to resonate with viewers at home. Since this is their full-time job, some make it their business to set a scheduled posting day or days where they will upload. There are many different types of YouTube creators, just like there are many different types of television shows. Almost every creator on the platform specializes in something, which pushes them into a certain category. These categories consist of fitness, beauty, comedy, gaming, ASMR, and many more. Some videos are for entertainment, while others are aimed at being informative. For example, creators who make content in relation to beauty can do makeup tutorials that can help people who are beginners. On the other hand, some creators make skits with the simple goal of making their viewers laugh.

It began with everyday people with exuberant personalities making videos using low budget production. It has now evolved to where the content put out by the creators have a full production team behind them. They hire videographers, use high-quality cameras, and some even splurge to pay for an editor. Throughout the years, they have gained admiration and respect, to which now they are viewed on the same level as celebrities to both brands and the consumers of

their content. Due to the massive fanbase that some influencers have obtained, they have been able to go on tour and get invited to influencer related conventions. The major conventions are Vidcon and Playlist Live, which allow a multitude of influencers to meet in one location to interact with fans. The idea of Vidcon was envisioned by two YouTube influencers themselves, known as the Vlogbrothers. Each year a select group of YouTube creators are invited to attend the event, and some are asked to speak on panels or even perform live. This convention that started in California has now expanded internationally to continents like Europe and Australia. Vidcon has become so popular that companies want to sponsor the event, especially ones that are centered around influencers like YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. YouTube didn't sponsor Vidcon until its second year, and now they have remained a sponsor ever since. These big companies set up booths with activities for both fans and creators. The booths also allow for photo opportunities that people will post on their social media accounts, giving these companies free advertising. This is great because thousands of people attend Vidcon every year. As written by the *Los Angeles Times*, the event only had 1,400 attendees in 2010, and this rose to about 25,000 guests in 2016. These numbers show that more and more people are looking to online video platforms as a form of entertainment.

YouTube began monetizing content in 2008, which was after it had accumulated a large number of users and expanded its reach to be used globally. Everyday people who brand themselves as influencers have to become a part of the YouTube Partner Program in order to make money from their videos. Through the program, creators are offered a variety of ways to earn money. The most common way for creators, or YouTube channel producers, to make money is through viewer engagement. According to TheStreet, creators earn about \$3 to \$10 for every 1000 views that their channel receives (O'Connell). The creator also receives 55% of the

ad revenue that was generated from that page. In June of 2018, YouTube decided to introduce channel memberships as a replacement name for sponsorships. This feature allows fans the chance to make monthly payments in return for special bonuses and exclusive content chosen by the influencer. YouTube also gives creators the option to go live on their channel, and there are features that allow fans to send them money with a message attached. These paid messages are known as Super Chats and fans are also capable of sending Super Stickers as well. Super Chats allow a comment to be pinned at the top for a certain amount of time depending on how much was paid. The higher the amount, the longer the comment stays at the top. Since the influencers are using this platform for their content, a percentage of the money they make goes to YouTube. For example, YouTube takes 30% of the money made from a livestream on their platform. In order to access all of these additional features, certain requirements need to be met before the influencer can make money from it (Richards).

As a creator grows and achieves an even bigger fanbase on their platform, YouTube gives them a reward. These rewards are known as plaques, which is YouTube's way of recognizing that a creator has reached a new milestone in the number of subscribers that they have accumulated on their channel. These milestones reward the creator when they have passed either a hundred thousand, a million, or ten million subscribers. Although, there is a rare case where a creator known as Pewdiepie passed 100 million subscribers and was rewarded a special plaque that no other person on the platform has. This is a nice gesture from YouTube to the influencers who help make the platform what it is. However, creators can only receive these plaques if they have been abiding by the community guidelines and aren't guilty of copyright infringement or buying their subscribers. YouTube has celebrated their creators in other ways by hosting an event called The YouTube Creator Summit. This was an event where only a select

few content creators were invited to attend. It is a way for creators to come together for a week to attend panels with speakers, expand their network, and have fun doing a variety of activities. The influencers also got some free YouTube swag with branded items like a water bottle, slippers, pins, and a denim jacket. Lastly, YouTube creates a video every year called YouTube Rewind that shows the highlights of what trends and influencers were popular that year.

The growth of a YouTube content creator has negative consequences, but it also has many positive ones like how their following extends to other platforms. When a creator gathers a large following on YouTube, their other social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok does as well. Due to creators having a significant amount of influential power over their audience, they are sometimes paid to do sponsored posts or stories on social media platforms like Instagram. As reported by *Vox*, a platform called Traackr discovered that 72 percent of brands are allocating their expenses to influencer marketing (Lieber). Influencers have built a relationship with their fans through their content which makes them feel more trustworthy as an endorser. Brands have decided to use this to their advantage, but this still comes at a cost. The number of followers an influencer has is what determines how much money they get paid for a post. Most of the mainstream YouTube creators tend to have at least a million followers, so they usually partner with big companies. An example of a big influencer marketing would be David Dobrik's partnership with SeatGeek. David is a YouTube creator with about 18 million subscribers, over 7 billion channel views, and 13 million Instagram followers. SeatGeek has sponsored many of David's videos, paying him thousands of dollars that has allowed him to give away cars to his friends. The brand deal soon extended to his Instagram, in which SeatGeek partnered with him to giveaway a Tesla Model 3 to one of his fans. This a mutual transaction in

which a brand gets to be marketed in front of a large audience and the influencer gets paid a large lump sum of money to do so.

The word “influencer” has become more prevalent during recent years due to social media being so easily accessible. Many of the recent influencers have come from apps like Vine, Musical.ly/TikTok, and YouTube. Musical.ly was an app that allowed people to create short videos of themselves lip-syncing to a song. These videos usually consisted of zoom-ins, transitions, and new trends; however, the app was later bought by a Chinese company who turned it into TikTok. The app has grown exponentially in the first quarter of 2020, and so many new influencers have been discovered since. It is a platform that gives a chance for any person to go viral with the “for you” page showing a variety of different videos. The “for you” page is the landing spot for the app and an account isn’t needed to scroll through it, only to interact with it. Due to this, many people have become popular just by simply posting short videos that have an opportunity to go viral. By posting a lot, a person has a higher chance of their video going viral. “How do these videos go viral?” you may ask, it’s due to how much engagement a post is getting. Even if a person has little to no following, as long as their post has been liked, shared or commented on plenty of times, it will keep appearing in the “for you” page for many others to see. Also, phones make it easy for people to record and post these videos on various social platforms. As reported by Statista, by the end of 2020 there will be roughly 3.5 billion people using smartphones. Given that smartphones are so easily accessible, almost anyone can become an influencer no matter their age, location, or social class.

Methodology

This research study is a case study using both quantitative and qualitative information. Four influencers who started out on YouTube and have been growing their platform ever since are analyzed. This analysis involves the examination of the influencers' YouTube videos, social media, and engagement on their platforms. The engagement is studied quantitatively by using SocialBlade, which is a website that tracks the views and trends to different social platforms. I have analyzed this data to understand their growth in views over the years and how that played into their overall success. I use the data presented in SocialBlade to choose moments in time that had the most significant growth and watched their YouTube videos from that time period. More information can be uncovered by looking at their other social media platforms to find out how people may truly feel about the influencer.

Case Studies

Shane Dawson

Shane Lee Yaw, or Shane Dawson, was born on July 19, 1988 in Long Beach, California. Before he began his YouTube career, he did try to become an actor by going to auditions since he was very close to Hollywood. When this didn't work out, he decided to create content on YouTube. In the beginning of his YouTube career, back in 2008, his videos consisted of brightly colored thumbnails with celebrities occasionally edited into them. Shane would also add titles that would be considered clickbait in order to get people to click on the videos. As a normal kid who doesn't come from a well-known family, he resorted to these methods in order to get people to view his videos. Shane would occasionally include his friends and family in the videos he filmed, which led to some issues. He was still working a day job in the earlier days of his

YouTube career, and this eventually led to some trouble for him. Shane posted a video to his channel of him pole dancing in his workplace and soon after he got fired. Even though his family members worked at different places, they were all fired from their jobs too. Some might say Shane had a rough start to YouTube since his content caused him, his brothers, and his mother to lose their jobs. However, this didn't stop him from continuing to make content and growing to attain the massive following that he has today.

Shane has been an influencer for so long that he was invited to attend the very first Vidcon back in 2010. There are a few other influencers who were invited who are still creating content till this day as well. The success of his channel allowed Shane to be invited to award shows that celebrate social media stars and web creators. The award ceremonies are called The Shorty Awards and The Streamys, both of which have nominated him at some point. Shane has chosen not to attend many of these award shows just like has chosen to stop attending events like Vidcon. The reason for this is because he just doesn't like conventions and anything of the sort. Just as Shane changed his mind on his feelings towards influencer related events, he also changed his mind plenty times on what category of videos he should do. In the earlier days of him filming, his content was mainly sit-down videos and vlogs. Shane really enjoys filmmaking so his vlogs would sometimes show the behind the scenes on whatever project he was working on. His sit-down videos would consist of him collaborating with other famous YouTube creators and even his girlfriend at the time. His girlfriend Lisa Schwartz is also a YouTube creator and her channel is called Lisbug. The two of them broke up back in 2015, but they are now on good terms with one another.

In November of 2014, Shane was announced the winner of a filmmaking competition set up by Starz. It was for a series called "The Chair" that was going to document the production of

two films both consisting of the same script. The goal of this show was to see who create a better film using the scripts that were given to them. Shane has always had the goal of becoming a producer or director, and this gave him the chance to test his filmmaking skills. He was set to compete against another filmmaker named Anna Martemucci for \$250,000. Shane named his film “Not Cool,” while Martemucci’s was named “Hollidaysburg.” The two apparently took different approaches in the filming of their movies. According to an executive producer by the name of Chris Moore, one was more artistic while the other was more mainstream. Shane brought his knowledge of mainstream media to the big screen and even though he won, not everyone enjoyed felt it was the better if the two. The producer of “The Chair” felt Martemucci’s was better and considered Shane’s to have been a waste of time. However, Shane took this as validation for understanding younger audiences unlike older filmmakers who aren’t aware of what current teenagers want to watch. His mainstream ideas probably came from his years of being a YouTube creator, which apparently worked in his benefit.

Another accomplishment made by Shane was the publications of two memoirs released in both 2015 and 2016. The first one was called “I Hate Myselfie: A Collection of Essays,” which did really well. It was the bestselling paperback being sold at Barnes & Noble along with having great sales in the first week. Even though his book did well, Shane was hoping to reach an older audience even though they don’t seem to be big fans of his work. His second memoir, “It Gets Worse: A Collection of Essays,” became a #1 *New York Times* bestseller. These collections discuss everything from his childhood to accepting his bisexuality. There hasn’t been a report of how much Shane made from these two memoirs, but it seems they are still being sold on websites like Barnes & Noble and Amazon.

Not all YouTube creators write a memoir or any form of book, but most of them do begin selling merch (short for merchandise, refers to products created by the influencer). However, unlike using the outlets dedicated to influencers, Shane chose Amazon to sell his merch and this service provided customers with faster shipping. Shane has stated that he didn't make as much from earlier merch drops due to issues negotiating for a fair percentage. This is actually common within creators and influencers not knowing their worth and taking unfair percentages from big corporations. Over time, he has learned and is doing much better in recent years.

The reason Shane's name has become so well-known on the platform is because he has managed to increase his following as the years go by. His content has evolved to very high production quality content where he takes months at a time to develop video concepts and record them. Shane has decided to expand his team and added a videographer by the name of Andrew Siwicki who also doubles as his editor. Shane partakes in the editing of his videos as well since he has a lot of experience with it from being a content creator for over 10 years. Throughout those years, his content vastly changed into what he now calls docuseries. These are a series of videos that are directed and edited in a documentary-like manner. In earlier videos, the goal of his content was to make people laugh, but with this new content, he is touching on heavier topics with a means to inform viewers. His first docuseries was released in late 2017 and it is considered short compared to his newer ones. He began his sequence of docuseries by recording a rather personal journey of him reconnecting with his father. This was a 3-part docuseries that gave viewers a look into the truth about Shane's past and how life was for him growing up. This consisted of a video of him explaining his past and the other two were conversations he had with each of his parents.

As he became more accustomed to shooting videos in this style that was new to him, he began to show not only his life, but the life of others. His first really big series that pulled in a lot of views was Shane switching lives with one of his good friends, Trisha Paytas. This was another 3-part series and each video averaged out to be about 30 minutes each. The first video alone amassed over 25 million views since it's been posted. The reason this video made for great content is because Trisha is known for leading a very different lifestyle than other creators and influencers. This kind of content attracted a lot of new viewers when led to more subscribers and overall more money from the monetization of these videos. In late 2018, Shane decided to upgrade his living situation and move from a \$1.7 million-dollar home in Studio City to a \$3 million-dollar house in Calabasas. Many of the videos he posted in 2018 acquired millions of views and were considerably long in comparison to other creators. As reported by SocialBlade, his channel was getting over 100 million views each month from March 2018 to October 2018. Within that same time frame, Shane was gaining an average of half a million views a month. Many influencers have lost their fanbase after doing video for years, but Shane has somehow found a way to grow with his audience. However, as of recent months, it seems that he is losing subscribers and had a significant drop in video views since he deleted many of his videos.





At the beginning of 2019, Shane began filming the journey of him making his first ever makeup palette. The idea came about in Shane's first docuseries with Jeffree Star, a popular YouTube creator in the beauty community. The first docuseries started with Shane switching lives with Jeffree but as the series went on, it became much deeper than that. Shane asked many questions that helped to reveal Jeffree's childhood and his struggles of being openly gay during a time where it wasn't accepted as much. Jeffree talks about growing up with nothing, and now with all his sources of income he makes around \$150 million dollars a year. Most of the income comes from his makeup company called Jeffree Star Cosmetics, his makeup line in which he sells a variety of products. Through this filming process, the two came up with an idea to create a palette that would properly represent Shane and his overall YouTube persona. Creating makeup products is a process that takes months of preparation and production, and Shane films the entire process. To avoid spoiling the outcome of the products and to keep the public from stealing their ideas, the videos weren't posted until the release date was very close. Due to this, Shane went months without posting because he was focused on filming this months-long series. The editing of the series took just as long, but viewers were excited for this heavily anticipated series of content. The series also served as a great promotion for the makeup products that they were planning on releasing. Jeffree Star estimated that Shane would make roughly \$10 million dollars

if all his makeup products were to completely sell out. Surprise, he did! There were so many people active on the website when his products launched that the website actually crashed. This led to a lot of people wondering if they were going to their items. Shane's products were also being sold on Morphe's website and they were all sold out within hours.

However, one of the big downsides to being in the public's eye for a long period of time is the hate that can come with it. This hate or bad publicity can negatively affect their image, which in turn can affect their views and subscriber count. Many viewers are involved in what is known as cancel culture – which is when they try to cancel an influencer for something offensive that they said or did. Recently, Shane got cancelled due to his association with certain people and then there were some old videos and tweets that resurfaced. Due to all this drama and negativity that was surrounding his name, some companies no longer wanted to associate themselves with him. Morphe decided to stop selling his makeup products on their website as a result of all the drama, which obviously results in money lost from not only the company but Shane as well. The phrase “any publicity is good publicity” doesn't particularly work in the case of influencers since their popularity is usually based on their likability. Even through all this, Shane's estimated net worth is still at around \$12 million. His longevity on YouTube is commended, however his image will be forever tainted. As stated by Two-Face, “You either die a hero, or live long enough to see yourself become the villain.”

Liza Koshy

Elizabeth “Liza” Koshy was born and raised in Houston, Texas with her mom, dad, and two sisters. She got her recognition from really a popular app created in 2013 known as Vine. Even though the app no longer exists, the following that she amassed during her time on the app continues to live on. She began her career on YouTube before the “death” of Vine, an app that allowed people to record quick six-second videos. Seeing as how the average person has an attention span of about 8 seconds, this was the perfect app for those to consume content. She started her YouTube channel in 2015, which at first consisted of her doing everyday things with added humor. Later, there were also skits that allowed her to create these other personas or characters that would expand her comedic creativity. In late 2015, she began dating a fellow Vine star and YouTube creator by the name of David Dobrik. The two appeared in several of each other’s videos and became one of the most beloved couples on YouTube. The couple later split posting a video called “we broke up” in the summer of 2018. To get an idea of how invested people were in their relationship, the breakup video amassed 17 million views after just one day and was trending number one in America.

Liza somehow smoothly transitioned her following from Vine over to YouTube. She was able to expand her humor from six second clips to full on YouTube skits with ease. The career she has built for herself on YouTube is one to be admired since she was able to accumulate 10 million subscribers in under 2 years. According to Tubefilter, Liza was one of only 105 channels that was able to reach 10 million subscribers in such a short amount of time (Weiss). She hit all three of the YouTube milestones and received all three plaques faster than most people on the platform. This quick growth is mainly due to her fame that came from Vine, but she is still considered self-made due to her having no fame in the media beforehand. However, now the list

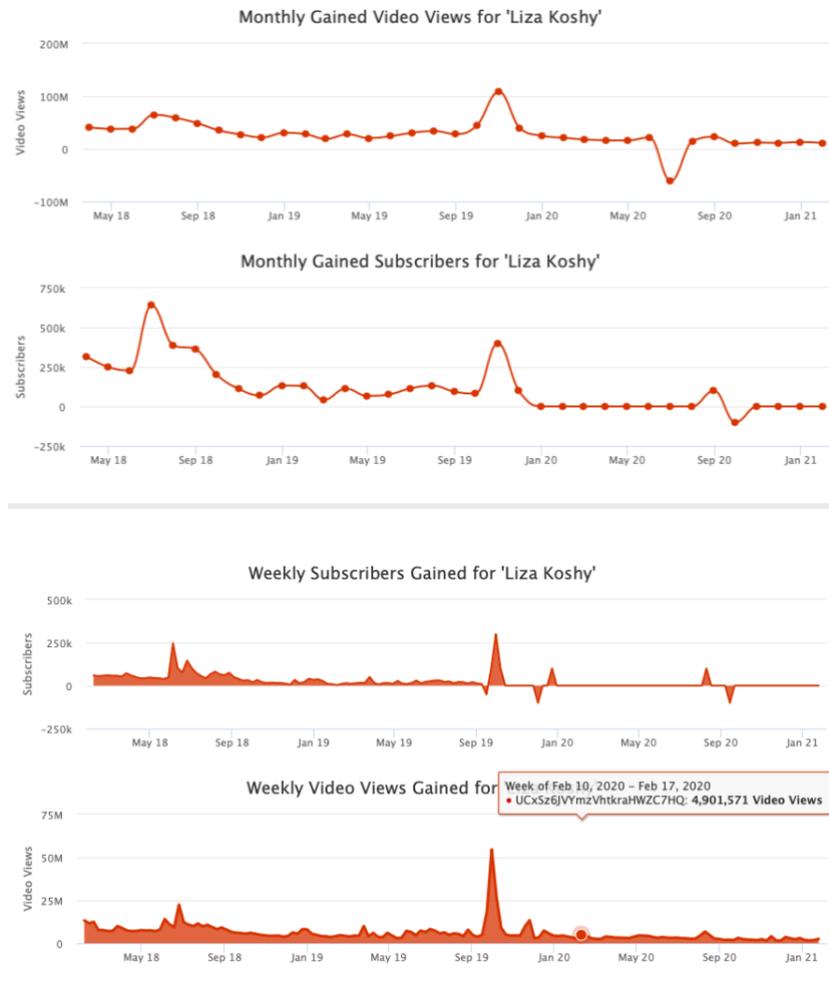
of influencers and celebrities she knows has grown to be something enviable by her peers. In 2016, her second year on the platform, she had the opportunity to interview President Barack Obama for the get-out-the-vote initiative. Since her main platform consists of comedic content, she would post videos that strayed from that path on her second channel. She started her second channel *Liza Koshy Too* in late 2016, which was just two months shy of her interview with President Obama. Having such a big platform is a huge responsibility and she chose to use it to influence her audience to be more active in politics. Most of her audience are Generation Z just like herself, which is why her voice matters.

Even though Liza began creating YouTube videos much later than most other creators, her success isn't shocking due to her ability to relate with viewers. She has the ability to make people laugh with her crazy puns, physical gags, and parodies of very popular trends and videos. Each year Liza's career expanded even further with her getting bigger and bigger opportunities. In 2016, she was booked for a part on a show called *Freakish*, a Hulu Original that lasted for two seasons. This show was created by AwesomenessTV and it is essentially about a bunch of teenagers locked in a high school during a zombie apocalypse with no adults. Around this time, a movie also came out in theaters starring Liza and a list of other YouTube creators. The movie that was released was called *Boo! A Madea Halloween*, which was directed by Tyler Perry. Liza seems to be making significant strides since her career began on Vine back in 2013. By joining YouTube, she was able to truly showcase her comedic talent, which led to many opportunities for her to expand her career. Around this same time, Liza's YouTube channel was blowing up. As of late 2016, her channel was receiving over 150 million monthly views.

Her quick growth could be due to her infectious personality and ability to relate with her audience, but it also could be due to the fact that she uses her platform for good. Not only is Liza

pushing her audience to be more involved in politics, but she partners herself alongside companies with a great message. She was a brand ambassador for The Giving Keys back in 2017. The Giving Keys is a jewelry company with a mission of paying it forward. It is a company working to end homelessness by hiring people transitioning out of it. It offers them a paying job in which they make necklaces with a key that has a message of positivity on it. Each key has one inspirational word like “love” or “brave” and you’re supposed to pay it forward by the giving the key away when someone needs it more than you. Liza discovered this company back in high school when her mother bought her a key. Now along with being an ambassador, Liza also released a limited-edition collection. This collection consisted of four different necklace/choker styles with two words to choose from. The two words Liza chose was “trust” and “laugh” because they are her favorite words of positivity.

In September of 2017, Liza broke a billion views on her main channel alone after posting consecutively on YouTube for about 2 years. At this time, she set a record for being a YouTube creator to hit 10 million subscribers in the shortest amount of time. By analyzing the graphs presented by SocialBlade, it shows that Liza hit some pretty big milestones on her YouTube channel. She has accomplished quite a lot for someone who has only been posting on their channel for two years. At the peak of her career, Liza would get about 10 million views in a week. Her views have significantly declined since she’s moved to mainstream media because she isn’t posting consistently like she used to. As of recently, Liza’s getting 1-3 million views a week and her subscriber count hasn’t moved in about a year.



On the other hand, she paved her own path and never stayed in the realm of just being an influencer. For example, she was the first digital/social media star to partake in *Vogue's 73 Questions* series that they post on their YouTube channel. This series consists of a videographer asking celebrities 73 questions as they give a brief tour of their house. In her house holds the awards she's received such as the Streamys Award for Comedy and Teen Choice Award for Female Web Star. She has earned many more awards recognizing her talent in later years as well. The year 2017 had a lot of firsts for Liza including her first merch drop, which was released in November. The collection consisted of black and white shirts and hoodies with the word

“introvert” written across it along with hats that read “offline.” The pieces were very simplistic, and they were not out very long.

In 2018, at the early age of 22, she was put on the Forbes 30 under 30 list. This is an amazing accomplishment to have been achieved by an internet personality, or influencer. This was also the year where many of her viewers had to adjust to the changes that were happening in her life. Liza sat down with her boyfriend of two years, David Dobrik to discuss their split, which they had kept secret for six months. This video left the internet quite shaken with almost all blog and gossip sites reporting on the news immediately. The video also went trending number one in America and reached over 13 million views within the first 24 hours. Her break up with David was for similar reasons as her break from YouTube, which was due to her mental health. Liza’s YouTube channel was very uneventful for most of 2018 because she decided to take a break since she was starting to burnout. YouTube creators use the word “burnout” as a way of saying they are at a creative block and fresh out of ideas for new videos. However, she did have new content being posted on her main channel because of her YouTube Red called *Liza on Demand*. These videos are free to watch on her main channel with the show having two seasons and recently renewed for a third. Liza already had experience being in a YouTube Red show from being on season two of *Escape the Night*, which was released in 2017. The program creator for *Escape the Night* is a fellow YouTube creator by the name of Joey Graceffa. The show is essentially a murder mystery featuring various YouTube creators who have to help solve it, but this involves most of them dying along the way. Due to this, the creators are different every season which gives viewers the chance to see their favorite influencer.

Liza was invited by Vogue to attend the 2018 Met Gala to interview the guests before they enter the venue. This event is very high class and only a select few celebrities are invited

each year. She got the chance to interview celebrities such as Rihanna, Harry Styles, Cardi B, and Michael B. Jordan. According to *Vogue*, Liza was completely starstruck while interviewing most of the celebrities she came across (Allaire). Somehow, she was still able to use her vivacious personality to create small conversations with each person while also asking them about their look. The Met Gala is known for its themes and since the people who attend are of a higher social class, the designers they are wearing are also something that they are asked about. *Vogue* loved Liza as their host, so they brought her back again for the 2019 Met Gala. *Vogue* wasn't the only hosting gig that Liza landed because she was also brought in to be the host of the revived show "Double Dare" on Nickelodeon. The show made its comeback in the summer of 2018 and came to an end once again at the end of 2019. Double Dare is a game show that involves two teams, red and blue, competing to win prizes by getting through obstacle courses and answering trivia questions. Her hosting experience is far beyond her years since she was also a co-host for the MTV reboot of Total Request Live. This was a show that focused on current artists, music and pop culture.

Not only is Liza the perfect candidate when casting an influencer as a host, but she also is a great pick as a brand ambassador. In 2019, Liza became the first brand ambassador for a company called C'est Moi. The company specializes in making affordable skincare and cosmetic products. Liza has used her YouTube platform to explain all the benefits the company has to offer. People may be more likely to purchase after seeing the product in a video versus an online ad. This year Liza partnered with YouTube to do a congratulations video for the graduating class of 2020 that unfortunately didn't have a proper ceremony. It may be a nice to gift to them to hear a message from one of their favorite creators acknowledging their accomplishment. Some people may consider Liza to be far more than an influencer because of the many things she has

accomplished outside of the YouTube community. Not many YouTube creators have branched over to acting world successfully, but Liza has managed to do that several times throughout her career. She is going to be starring in an up-and-coming Netflix movie called *WORK IT*, which will be released in the beginning of August 2020. The movie will also have actors Sabrina Carpenter and Jordan Fisher as the leads alongside Liza. Through all of these endeavors, Liza has never talked about the amount of money she makes. However, according to Moneyinc.com, Liza was estimated to be worth about \$4.4 million as of 2018 (Parker). Her net worth has definitely increased since then as her channel continues to grow and she books more gigs.

Ryan Kaji

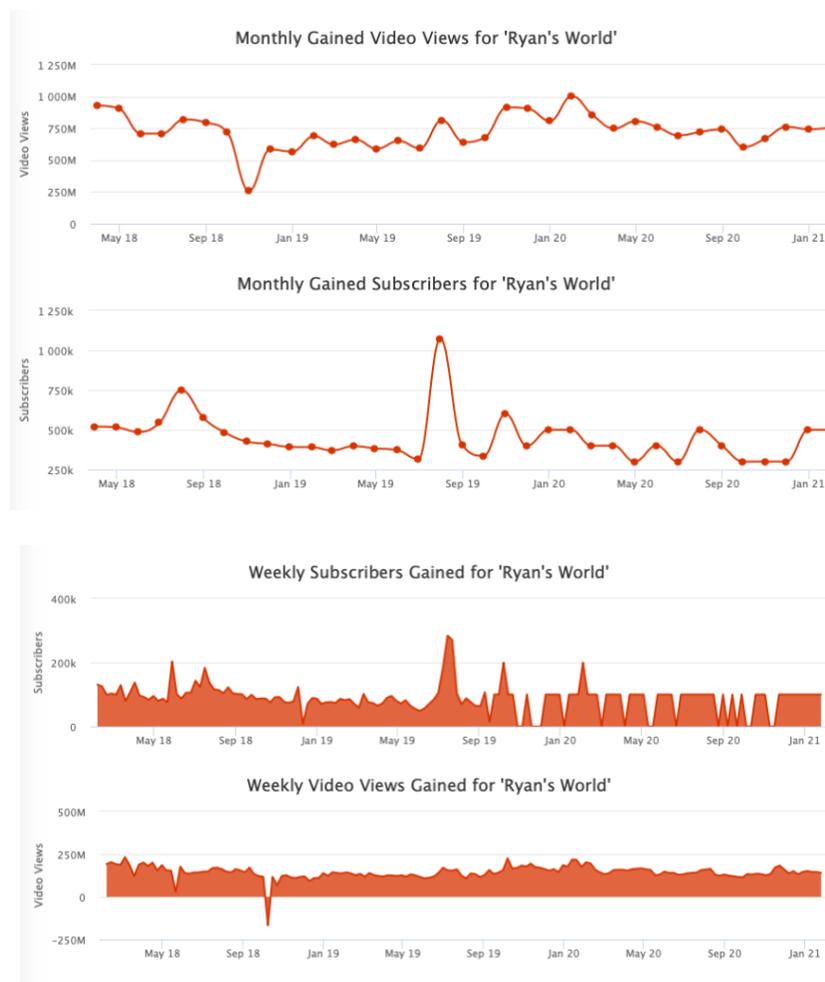
Ryan Kaji started his YouTube journey back in March of 2015 at the very young age of three. His father helped to start this channel that he called Ryan ToysReview, but it is now called Ryan's World. Like most other kids, Ryan enjoys picking out toys at the store and he also enjoys playing with them. Even though he is much younger than most other creators on the platform, he has built quite the name for himself. By the age of six, he had already gained 10 million subscribers on his channel and would get millions of views on his videos. He has blown up to become one of most popular child influencers. Ryan is the highest paid YouTube creator in America, which is surprising for many since he is so young. He makes more than people twice his age and those that have been creating content for twice as long.

It is easy to make money on YouTube once you've built a following, but only if the person monetizes the videos on their channel. It turns out that Ryan's family didn't know this until his mother was searching for tips on video quality and discovered monetization. The videos weren't getting as many views back then, so his mom decided to set a few dollars aside to buy

new toys for Ryan to unbox on camera. The first check that they received was about \$100, which is much different from the paychecks they receive today. Seeing as how the most popular way for YouTube creators to make money is through views and AdSense, Ryan is thriving on the platform. The most viewed video on his channel has two billion views, which is similar to the amount of views that music videos by famous artists get. The titles for his most popular videos are wordy because it seems his parents were trying to squeeze in a bunch of keywords that might get searched. For example, the video with 2 billion views was titled “HUGE EGGS Surprise Toys Challenge with Inflatable water slide.” This is completely different from creators who make content for older audiences, where the titles are more for clickbait than search keywords.

The very first video on his channel is Ryan in the toy aisle of a store picking out a new toy take home and play with. The video also shows Ryan unboxing and playing with the toy for everyone to see. Seeing as how his channel was called was Ryan ToysReview in the beginning, the concept of this channel was for Ryan to give his feedback on any toy he decided to open on camera. The channel has grown from just toy reviews to making videos that pertain to education. Even though his channel is very successful now, it wasn't doing too well in earlier postings. The growth of his channel has led to many opportunities for him and his family. According to SocialBlade, Ryan's videos financially make him (and his family) roughly six to a hundred thousand dollars a video. In January 2020 alone, Ryan's YouTube channel contracted one billion views. It seems that he averages about 700 million views a month and SocialBlade estimates that to be between \$200k and \$3.2 million in monthly earnings. The average number of subscribers that Ryan has gained each month from May 2019 to May 2020 is roughly 460,000. His channel seems to be growing at a fast rate and has been overall consistent in the past two years.

This channel has allowed the family to move into a much bigger house in Texas worth a little over a million dollars. It has also allowed for the parents to quit their day job to put all their effort into helping Ryan's channel thrive. The parents also decided to create a second channel called the Kaji Family, which was created in late 2016. The Kaji Family consists of the parents, Shion and Loann Kaji, Ryan, and his younger twin sisters Emma and Kate. This channel has acquired about 6 million subscribers and 7.4 billion total channel views. Therefore, the family is also receiving money from this channel as well.



Channels like Ryan's World and the Kaji Family do well because they are also allowed to be on YouTube Kids. YouTube Kids is a platform that was founded in 2015, which happens to be the same year that Ryan's channel was made. The platform was created to provide a family-

friendly outlet for the surge of internet videos that are being posted to YouTube every day. It allows parents to put a sort of parental control over the videos their kids are consuming on YouTube. The kid's version is easy to navigate, and the content is chosen based on the selected age of the child. Ryan's videos are meet the criteria to be allowed on the platform, especially because he falls into age range for YouTube Kids. The ages are broken out into three main categories: preschool (4 and under), younger (ages 5-7), and older (8-12). Even though Ryan is only eight, his content has resonated with children of all ages. According to an article written by *The Washington Post*, the amount of screen time for younger kids has doubled to about an hour each day (Siegel). Generation Alpha (born after 2010) is so accustomed to technology that many of them can't go without it and spend most of their time on it.

Ryan became a part of the Nickelodeon family in April 2019 with his show called *Ryan's Mystery Playdate*. The show has a total of three seasons and 52 episodes. The show features his parents and some animated characters named Gus the Gummy Gator and Combo Panda. Ryan's *Mystery Playdate* deals with imagination, challenges, and solving mysteries. He must solve a puzzle in order to find out who his playdate will be. In 2019, the show was announced to be the number one preschool show on television. In the summer of 2019, Ryan partnered with Colgate, a dental hygiene company, to release some products of his own. There is a video on his YouTube channel that shows Ryan and his family going on a trip to the facility in New Jersey. This is where Ryan got to choose the design for his products while also getting a walkthrough on how the products are made. Fans can see Ryan choosing everything from the color of the toothbrush to the flavor of the toothpaste and mouthwash, which is bubble fruit by the way. The people who watch his videos are typically young kids like himself so by making these kinds of videos, he is promoting the importance of dental hygiene to his viewers. It can be hard for some parents to get

their kids to brush their teeth, but if they had one of Ryan's products it might get them excited. The video also had a lot of educational aspects in which the workers assisted Ryan in creating toothpaste while showing the name of the ingredients.

Along with the dental products, Ryan also has a massive merch empire with his name all over it. The merch consists of toys, clothes, bikes, video games, and so much more. These products once again are sold at major retailers and there is a wide variety to choose from. To list some of the items in the Ryan World's franchise, there are bean bags, ATVs, bikes, surprise eggs, headphones, action figures, doll, PS4 game, and pajamas. All of those items could be easily bought by visiting the Walmart website. His channel has built him a platform that has expanded to a business. It is said that in 2019, Ryan's YouTube channel brought in about \$26 million dollars in income, making him the highest paid creator in America. This doesn't include the money he is making through other endeavors. This year, Ryan was nominated for the Kids' Choice Awards for the category Favorite Male Social Star. Ryan has a large following with about 26 million subscribers and over 40 billion channel views. These numbers are unbelievable for a channel that has only been active for five years. Ryan also has an estimated net worth of \$40 million at the young age of eight.

David Dobrik

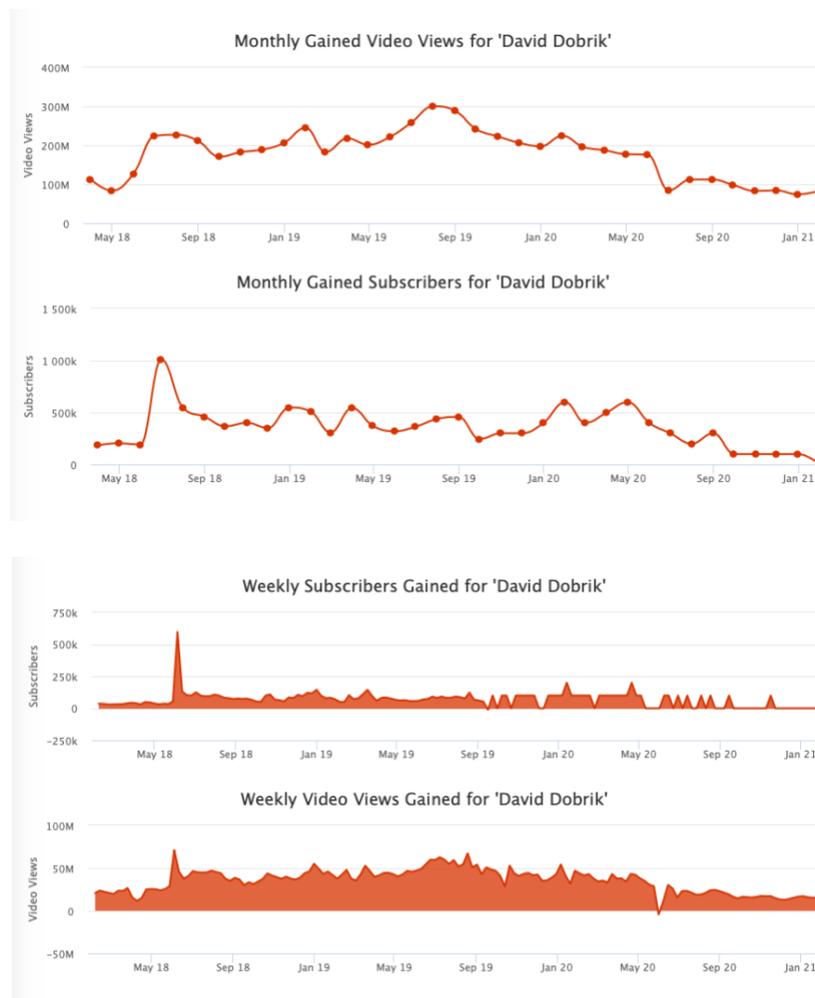
David Dobrik was born in Slovakia but moved to America when he was around 6 years old. He was raised in what he considers to be his hometown, Vernon Hills, Illinois. Even though he has lived in America most his life, he is not a legal citizen but a recipient of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Unlike David, his three siblings Ester, Sara, and Toby were all born in America. Similar to Liza and most other YouTube creators, David's career in social

media began when he became big on an app known as Vine. He attempted to go to college, but quickly found out it wasn't for him, so he decided to drive across the country to Los Angeles, California. However, he didn't make the move alone because he decided to make the drive with a few of his hometown friends. Due to his popularity on Vine, he was able to connect with some other internet stars that are still his friends to this day. This made the transition easier since he had other influencers to make videos with and was surrounded by those in the same circumstance as him. Since David wanted to make something long-term out of this fame, he decided to join YouTube in 2015. It was long journey to his current success where he has 18 million subscribers and about 7.5 billion overall channel views.

He started his YouTube channel by making vlogs and he has been doing that ever since. Vlogging is when an influencer brings their camera around with them to give people a sneak peek into their lives. This is a very low-budget form of content since all you need is a camera and a program to help edit the videos down to a reasonable amount of time. David wasn't making a lot of money at the time, so this was the best bet for him. The vlogs that he was making mainly consisted of conversations and outings with the friends that he made from doing Vine. Some of his friends were Zane Hijazi, Heath Hussar, Gabbie Hanna, Scotty Smith, and Todd Smith, all of which are YouTube creators at the moment. Another person who made regular appearance in his videos was girlfriend at the time, Liza Koshy, as previously stated. Around this time, his vlogs were starting to take off and people were really enjoying the content he was putting out. The content was easily digestible due to them remaining under 7 minutes. Sooner or later, David discovered what worked for him which was clickbait titles and making every video he posted exactly four minutes and twenty seconds (get it). Also, all of his friends partied and did crazy things, and David would put all these funny and crazy clips together. When asked to describe his

content, he responds by comparing it to a movie trailer where you simply highlight the best parts of the overall thing.

The growth of David's YouTube could be considered both slow and fast. According to SocialBlade, he only had about 4 million subscribers when he hit a billion views. With that being said, his overall channel views climbed rapidly, but his subscriber count was more of a steady growth. He was posting consistently three vlogs a week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. After doing YouTube for about a year, he began to make enough money off his videos to buy a Tesla Model X. The cost of this car for the make and year comes out to about be a little over \$100,000 dollars. This car is very expensive because Tesla is known for having some special features like self-driving mode, a 15-inch touchscreen, and falcon wing doors. This was his first big purchase, which says a lot in comparison to the purchases he's made in recent years. Recently, David was able to surprise one of his closest friends, Jason Nash, with the same car but in black. The reason David gifted him such an expensive car is because Jason has offered and brought so much into making the vlogs comical and entertaining for viewers. He has done this for a few of his other friends who have also contributed their personality and humor into making his short vlogs an amusing four minutes. For example, David has done things like shoot them with paintballs, put animals/insects on them while they are blindfolded, and chase them around with a blowtorch. He is known for doing light-hearted pranks that causes his friends to give him a big reaction to catch on camera. SocialBlade estimates that the yearly earning for David's channel this year is between \$240k and \$3.8 million. Even though David hasn't posted many videos in 2020, he has somehow managed to get about 100 million views each month. On the other hand, the number of subscribers he gains each month has decreased and it seems to be getting lower each month.



David became known for his outrageous vlogs, so he decided to create a second channel for videos that don't fit with the theme of his main. The second YouTube channel is called David Dobrik Too, which is where he does mainstream trendy videos and some of his branded videos. He started this channel about year after his main and this allowed him to be more intimate with his fans. Soon, like most other creators, David created merch using a company called Fanjoy. The theme for his merch was the word "clickbait" since that is how David got people to click on his video for many years. At the beginning of 2019, David had finally hit the 10 million subscriber mark and received the third of the YouTube plaque rewards. He soon decided to branch In May of 2017, he started a podcast with Jason called Views, where they sit down and

discuss the things everyone doesn't get to see on their channels. The two haven't had any official guests on the platform because it is a very informal one where they chat with whoever is around when they are recording. They decided to have a tour for the Views podcast in which they went to a select few locations in the country. For the tour, they chose to bring as many people from their friend group as possible. Since all of his vlogs always feature his friends, fans soon came up with a name for this rowdy group, the Vlog Squad. The name stemmed from the fact that majority of the friend group were also vloggers.

Besides all the humor that the Vlog Squad brings to David's videos, SeatGeek has also played a really vital role in his growth as well. SeatGeek is a platform where people can book tickets to events like concerts, sports games, and theater shows. David has somehow formed a really good relationship with the people at SeatGeek and has been sponsored by them on several occasions. Most companies have realized that setting money aside for influencer marketing can be beneficial in reaching a younger audience. The difference with David is that he uses these opportunities in a much more unique way than other influencers. As stated in an article from TubeFilter, David decided early in his career that if he were to get a brand deal, he would use that check for his video. What this means is that David uses the money to give to someone and records their reaction for his vlog. The first time one of his videos was sponsored by SeatGeek, he bought tickets for two of his friends to go to the World Series. They are both really big fans of baseball so one of them reacted by crying and the other one wasn't completely sure the tickets were real. David has continued to use his SeatGeek brand deals to give back to others. He has bought over 20 cars on his channel and most of them were paid for with money given to him by SeatGeek. The cars include both regular and luxury, he's bought everything from a Toyota to a Tesla. With the help of SeatGeek, he has also given money to help pay for his friend's

honeymoon and wedding. David has even used the money to giveaway Tesla Model 3 cars to his fans. His most recent giveaway was in July of 2020, in which he would give a fan with the most likes on TikTok a brand-new Tesla. The fact that he is always willing to give to others helps not only help his brand but SeatGeek's as well.

David has a reputation that precedes himself and has shown this on national television plenty of times. He has been on talk shows like *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* and *The Kelly Clarkson Show*. David has also been in the position of a host from when he was asked to co-host the Teen Choice Awards with Lucy Hale in 2019. His experience on TV is not that of an actor, but he has done some projects. Nickelodeon reached out to David to be one of the judges for their new competition show called *America's Most Musical Family*. The show was hosted by Nick Lachey and David got to sit next to the two other judges, Ciara and Debbie Gibson. As a social media influencer, this was a huge opportunity for him because he got to work alongside some major celebrities. David has also managed to get plenty of other celebrities just as big to be in his vlogs. He has a video on his channel where he surprises his friend with Kendall Jenner and another video where he surprises his fans with Kylie Jenner. David decided to do a special vlog for his 420th where he got Snoop Dogg to be in the intro of the video. This video was also the first time David bought cars to giveaway to his friends, so it started a new trend for him. Most celebrities like Justin Bieber, Kevin Hart, Courtney Cox, David Blane, and Wayne Brady have made special appearances in his vlogs. However, there are others who have really enjoyed being around David and his friends who have made several appearances like Charlie Puth, Howie Mandel, Josh Peck, and John Stamos.

Through all of this, David is seen by his fanbase as not letting the fame get to his head and trying to stay grounded. A part of this was offering one of his hometown best friends,

Natalie Mariduena, the opportunity to live with him and be his assistant. She gets to be a part of everything he does and meets a bunch of celebrities along the way. David and Natalie are super close friends which sparked fans and certain media outlets into thinking they were in a relationship. The two have never dated but that won't stop fans from shipping them together. Nevertheless, their completely platonic bond led to them being invited to be on Glamour's YouTube channel to take a friendship test. Her camera time in his vlogs steadily increased over time as she got used to the influencer and vlogger lifestyle. She is now a prominent part of his videos and is considered to be a part of the Vlog Squad even though she doesn't make YouTube videos. David has also recently invited another one of his hometown friends, Ilya, to stay with him but he isn't employed by David. Even though David already had Natalie as an assistant, he decided to hire two more down the line as his brand was expanding. As he is becoming more popular, more and more opportunities are being thrown his way. His growth in popularity can be shown through his accomplishments and many awards. He has been awarded a Teen Choice Award, a Streamy Award, a Shorty Award, and two Kids' Choice Awards.

David has been doing YouTube for about five years, but this has never deterred his vision of how his channel should look. This began to cause trouble with him when YouTube started cracking down on community guidelines. David tends to post content that is not intended for people of all ages to watch. His videos include his friends drinking, throwing up, and sometimes naked with only a censor bar to cover the private parts. YouTube has guidelines that could cause a channel to get demonetized if they promote alcohol, drugs, and explicit language. David breaks all of these guidelines in majority of his vlogs, which is why his checks from YouTube have decreased over time. According to *Insider*, David did an interview with *Men's Health* where he revealed that he used to make around \$275,000 a month but now he only makes about \$2000. By

this, he means the revenue he is earning from his YouTube channel. Luckily, he has his podcast and merch line as other sources of income. David also made an investment when he decided to buy a \$2.4 million-dollar house at the age of 20 back in 2017. He is currently looking to sell that house now for \$3 million so he can move into a neighborhood with more privacy and better security.

Findings

Over the past few years, there has been a rise in the number of influencers due to it progressively becoming a common career choice. It also helps that there are many platforms in which people can express themselves freely to gain a following. Through my research, the most popular social media influencers have developed their fanbase on their own with no prior connections to the media. They had no social presence or understanding of how the media works beforehand, so they had to pave their own way in this industry and learn day by day. Also, with there being so many different types of influencers, there is no direct guide on how to navigate in this industry. For example, not every influencer grows their audience at the same rate and not every influencer creates the same content. Yet, a common theme amongst influencers is that they have relatable personalities and honest opinions that make them feel trustworthy to their audience. This helps them for when they decide to start commercializing their platform by accepting offers like brand deals or sponsorships. In order for them to do this, their platform must have a certain amount of clout, or followers, for the brand or company to want to work with them.

Another commonality that I noticed in the case study is that none of the influencers expected the following and life that they have today. All four started posting videos as a hobby simply because it was something fun for them to do in their free time. However, a major difference is that not all influencers started by creating content on YouTube. Due to the growth of social media platforms, it is possible for anyone to get famous through one of the various channels. Popular influencers have come from social media platforms like Vine, Instagram, and YouTube. With new platforms constantly emerging, it allows for a wave of new influencers to take the spotlight. Whether they started on YouTube or moved there from Vine, it shows that as

long as an influencer creates good content, their audience will follow them anywhere. It seems that a big part of being an influencer is that your following and influence will go beyond the platform you started on.

According to *Forbes*, a platform called MuseFind composed data that showed 92% of consumers trust the opinion of an influencer over a celebrity endorsement or traditional advertisement (Weinswig). It seems that consumers feel that influencers, unlike celebrities, will be more honest and upfront on what they truly think about a product or service. For this very reason, it is important that influencers remain honest and genuine in the eyes of their audience. Being a social media influencer is fleeting for some due to the many things that come with being a part of it. If their reputation is damaged, then people will no longer want to associate themselves with the influencer. The trust and admiration that was once held for them is now gone. This would lead to decrease in their views and overall lack of engagement with their content across all platforms. The influencer will be surrounded by so much negativity and bad publicity that even brands will be looking to dissociate from them. Another reason for a drop in views could be inconsistent posting, especially because YouTube is a large platform with thousands of creators to choose from.

These influencers, or creators, who post on YouTube are able to monetize their videos, and if they have a large enough platform, they could potentially make millions in the span of a year. Through the analysis of graphs presented on SocialBlade, most of the top creators make around six figures a month, if not more. That is only the amount being made directly from YouTube, not including sponsorships, merch sales, and paid appearances. A paid appearance could consist of hosting award shows or interviewing celebrities at events. To be offered an opportunity that big is only possible for big influencers who have stepped out the world of social

media to gain popularity in the eyes of traditional media. Even though they have amassed millions of followers, influencers are still working towards building a name for themselves outside of their YouTube channels. It seems that a few of them have been successful at making their way towards celebrity status. Some have been casted into shows or movies released on streaming services like Hulu, Netflix, and YouTube Red. A select few have also been casted into movies that were released in theaters. With their dedicated fanbase, they are able to do a variety of different projects in mainstream media, and still have that continual support.

Conclusions

With the way society is moving today, it seems that technology will continue to be apart of our everyday lives. This is good for the career of a social media influencer who can prove to be successful for years to come. They are extremely influential to their audience, which makes them something for people and businesses to watch out for. The influencers' genuine nature makes consumers feel good when purchasing their product recommendations. Their accessibility also makes them seem more personable than a celebrity, since their job is to engage with their audience. The social media industry continues to grow as it becomes more common for people to become influencers. In turn, this also provides more jobs in big businesses and corporations. More and more businesses are setting money aside for Influencer Marketing, and with that, they need to hire someone to handle that portion of the business. Being a social media influencer is a developing career, but so are all the jobs that are being created that are associated with them.

Looking at the analysis of the case study, I am not surprised by most of the findings. In earlier years, becoming an influencer seemed like a game of luck because it was a job title that was just unheard of. With that being said, it does make sense how some of the biggest creators

on YouTube never expected to become famous or make money from it. However, something that did surprise me was the amount of money that an influencer could make just from YouTube alone. It is also astonishing to see how many opportunities are available for them once they have gathered a huge following. Just like most things in life, these opportunities are only available to those who are willing to put themselves out there. Amy Jo Martin once said, “Social media is the ultimate equalizer. It gives a voice and a platform to anyone willing to engage.”

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