

Decolonial Discourse in Postcolonial Contexts: How YouTubers Negotiate Audience Tensions, Platform Governance, and State Influence

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Decolonial discourse on online platforms is often framed in terms of creator motivations and expressive possibilities. In this paper, we examine what it takes to sustain such discourse under layered sociotechnical constraints. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with YouTubers engaging in Bengali decolonial discourse, we analyze how audience publics, platform governance, and state influences shape what becomes sayable, visible, and viable. We show how fragmented postcolonial identities among audiences produce legitimacy policing, harassment, and coordinated backlash, requiring ongoing relational labor from creators. At the platform level, differential monetization, opaque moderation, and copyright regimes reorganize which publics are economically viable and reinforce existing hierarchies. Further, intermediaries such as multi-channel networks mediate regulatory pressure, introducing political risks and constraints on participation. In response, content creators engage in strategies of negotiation, including boundary work, infrastructural improvisation, and multi-platform distribution. Overall, our findings highlight the layered dynamics of decolonial discourse in postcolonial contexts and the continuous work required to sustain it in platformed environments.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: YouTube, Bengali, Decolonial, Postcolonial, Identity

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1 INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have become important sites for articulating, contesting, and reimagining identities [36, 66, 111]. In particular, video-sharing platforms such as YouTube enable creators to engage in cultural discourse that challenges dominant narratives, foregrounds local perspectives, and reconstructs cultural meanings [22, 94]. Together, these practices constitute forms of decolonial discourse that challenge colonial hierarchies of knowledge and representation, often through content focused on sociopolitical and cultural aspects [29]. However, sustaining such discourse is not simply a matter of producing content. It requires navigating a layered sociotechnical environment shaped by fragmented, complex, postcolonial conditions. While prior work has examined identity

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50 expression and online discourse [12, 64, 101] as well as platform governance [58, 140], less is known
51 about how content creators sustain decolonial discourse under the intersecting constraints.

52 In this paper, we examine YouTubers' practices to engage in Bengali¹ decolonial discourse.
53 Understanding these dynamics requires situating them within the historical and geopolitical
54 context of the Bengal region, which spans present-day Bangladesh and parts of India. Bengal
55 was among the earliest regions to be colonized under British rule in the Indian subcontinent [99].
56 In 1947, the partition of British India divided Bengal along religious lines: Hindu-majority West
57 Bengal became part of India, while Muslim-majority East Bengal became part of Pakistan as East
58 Pakistan [118, 128]. In addition to having little in common between East Pakistan and West Pakistan,
59 except for the majority religion being Islam, the political, linguistic, and economic marginalization
60 of the former by the latter culminated in the Bengalis in East Pakistan fighting in the Liberation
61 War and the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation in 1971 [148]. These successive
62 colonial and postcolonial transformations fractured Bengali identity across religious, linguistic, and
63 national lines, producing enduring tensions over belonging, legitimacy, and representation [19].
64 These dynamics persist in contemporary India, where Bengali identity is often marginalized, as
65 Bengali-speaking individuals are subjected to suspicion, exclusion, and at times misidentified
66 as "illegal", reflecting broader tensions around language and national belonging [98, 151]. As a
67 result, creators engaging in decolonial discourse operate within a transnational environment where
68 audiences are not unified but composed of multiple, overlapping publics shaped by these historical
69 divisions [5, 150].

70 Existing research in human-computer interaction (HCI) and computer-supported cooperative
71 work (CSCW) has examined how online platforms support identity work and enable marginalized
72 communities to challenge dominant narratives [36, 41]. Complementary work has shown how
73 platform governance structures participation through monetization systems, moderation practices,
74 and algorithmic visibility [78, 85]. However, these strands of research often offer limited attention
75 to how interactional dynamics among creators and audiences, platform governance, and broader
76 sociopolitical conditions are entangled in shaping participation in postcolonial contexts [75].
77 We argue that decolonial discourse on online platforms, such as YouTube, is not merely a form
78 of individual expression but a situated, collective practice that must be continuously sustained
79 through ongoing interactions among creators, audiences, and institutional actors (e.g., platforms,
80 governments). This requires examining how content creators coordinate with fragmented publics,
81 negotiate shared meanings and expectations, interpret and navigate opaque platform systems, and
82 manage risks shaped by political and institutional environments.

83 To address this gap, we conducted a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with
84 15 YouTubers across Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Our analysis explains how creators navigate
85 challenges related to audience tensions, platform governance (e.g., monetization, moderation,
86 copyright), and state-linked regulatory environments. We examine both the constraints they
87 encounter and the strategies they develop to sustain participation, including relational labor,
88 infrastructural practices, and risk management. By focusing on video-mediated discourse in a
89 transnational postcolonial setting, our study provides insights into how sociotechnical systems
90 shape not only what can be expressed but also what can be sustained over time.

91 Our findings contribute to HCI scholarship on supporting group work in three key ways. First,
92 we conceptualize decolonial discourse as a form of relational labor amid postcolonial tensions,
93 in which creators continuously negotiate identity, legitimacy, and audience expectations across
94 fragmented publics. Second, we show how global platform governance produces misalignments
95 in postcolonial contexts, requiring creators to interpret and adapt to systems whose assumptions

96
97 ¹Bengali is the exonym for both the ethnolinguistic group of people (endonym Bangali) and the language (endonym Bangla).
98

do not align with local realities. Third, we highlight how participation is conditioned by ongoing negotiations over risk, trust, and safety, in which anticipatory fear and political uncertainty shape both expression and collaboration. Together, these contributions extend prior work on identity, platform governance, and trust & safety by foregrounding the conditions under which decolonial discourse is sustained in postcolonial conditions through contemporary sociotechnical systems.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section situates our work at the intersection of postcolonial identity formation, online decolonial discourse, and platform governance. We first examine how identities are shaped and fragmented into contested publics, especially through colonization. We then discuss how online communities accommodate and constrain decolonial discourse across those postcolonial identities. Finally, we review how such cultural production is shaped by YouTube's platform governance, which dictates whose voices are amplified, contested, or marginalized.

2.1 Postcolonial Identity Manifested as Contested Publics

Identity is not a fixed or internally possessed attribute but is relational, negotiated, and performed through social interaction [46, 56, 59]. While often theorized at the individual level, identity is deeply shaped by collective affiliations, where people define themselves and are recognized by others based on perceived membership in social groups [137, 144]. These collective identities are not static; they are continuously constructed and contested through everyday interactions across dimensions such as religion, language, nationality, gender, and class [103]. One of the mechanisms through which these identities have been historically impacted was colonialism [19, 95, 114].

Colonization is the process by which an external power occupies and governs a territory and its people, imposing political control, economic extraction, and cultural domination [48, 93, 108]. In postcolonial contexts, collective identity is fragmented into communities along externally imposed categories [7, 19, 95]. Colonial regimes often reconfigured social boundaries by privileging simplified and dichotomous classifications, such as religion or ethnicity, while overlooking the complex and overlapping ways in which people understood themselves and others [63]. As a result, postcolonial societies continue to experience tensions across multiple axes of identity, in which affiliations based on language, religion, and nation-state remain in flux and often compete with one another [19].

The Bengali context provides a salient example of such layered and contested identity formation. Colonial and postcolonial political processes, including partition and nation-state formation, produced enduring fractures across religious (e.g., Hindu–Muslim) [21, 40], linguistic (e.g., Bengali) [19], and national (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) lines [118]. These processes did not simply divide populations geographically but also reshaped how individuals negotiate their sense of belonging across orthogonal, sometimes conflicting, identity categories. Prior work has shown that such tensions persist in contemporary settings, where individuals are frequently compelled to prioritize or reconcile competing identity claims (e.g., being “Bengali” versus “Indian” or “Muslim”) [36, 97]. Given the caste demography and agrarian–urban differences across West Bengal and East Bengal, these also often become further complicated and intertwined with caste politics [128] and *sociolects*² (dialects of particular social classes) [30, 104]. Thus, postcolonial identity is best understood as inherently fragmented, situational, and negotiated rather than singular or stable.

These dynamics become especially visible within publics, where identity is not only expressed but also evaluated and contested. Building on the notion of imagined communities [5], publics

²*Bangal*: a broad Bengali accent associated with East Bengal (Bangladesh), often linked to agrarian backgrounds, and later got historically associated with refugee identities following the 1947 partition and mass migration from East Bengal to West Bengal [20, 80], and *Ghoti*: a broad Bengali accent associated with West Bengal, India [31].

148 can be understood as spaces where individuals orient themselves toward others whom they may
149 never directly encounter but nonetheless imagine as part of a shared audience [150]. In digitally
150 mediated environments, such publics are networked and participatory, where audiences actively
151 interpret, respond to, and regulate discourse [90]. Rather than acting as passive consumers, they
152 play a critical role in shaping what forms of identity expression are considered legitimate, authentic,
153 or acceptable [12, 102]. Within these contested publics, processes of legitimacy and authenticity
154 are often enforced through boundary policing [101, 119]. Individuals who articulate identities
155 or perspectives that do not align with dominant expectations may be questioned, challenged, or
156 excluded. Such policing frequently draws on historically rooted hierarchies and norms, including
157 those shaped by colonial and postcolonial power relations. For example, practices such as *adda*—
158 historically significant informal conversational spaces in colonial Bengal where social, cultural,
159 and political ideas were debated—are now reproduced online [17, 18]. Participants can similarly
160 contest and police the legitimacy of identity claims in those spaces. These scrutinies may often
161 be based on perceived alignment with national, religious, or linguistic norms, reflecting broader
162 struggles over who has the authority to represent particular communities or narratives.

163 These forms of boundary enforcement are further intensified along gendered and cultural
164 lines [2, 119]. To sustain engagement and trust, people perform relational labor—the ongoing work of
165 building, maintaining, and managing relationships with audiences [11]. Overall, identity expression
166 in public spaces is often mediated by norms around respectability, appearance, and behavior,
167 which disproportionately constrain marginalized groups [67]. In postcolonial contexts, these norms
168 intersect with colonial legacies of cultural hierarchy [136], where certain practices, aesthetics,
169 and forms of expression are privileged over others, while others are positioned as subaltern—
170 groups structurally excluded from dominant regimes of representation and voice [139]. As a result,
171 individuals navigating public discourse must contend not only with competing identity claims but
172 also with expectations around how those identities should be performed. While prior research has
173 examined identity formation and contestation both offline and online, this paper examines how
174 creators engage diverse audiences across multiple postcolonial contexts and how identity-based
175 tensions are expressed, negotiated, and enforced within transnational, video-mediated, decolonial
176 discourse on YouTube.

177 2.2 Decolonial Discourse as Identity Work in Online Communities

179 Decolonial discourse refers to processes through which individuals and communities critically
180 confront colonial histories and their enduring effects on identity, culture, and systems of knowledge,
181 while actively reclaiming autonomy over self-definition [48, 49, 86]. Identity decolonization, in this
182 sense, involves not only resisting imposed categories and hierarchies but also reconstructing ways of
183 knowing, being, and belonging beyond colonial frameworks [86]. Online communities have emerged
184 as important sites for such discourse, where individuals and groups engage in critical conversations
185 about historical and contemporary structures of power, identity, and marginalization [27]. In these
186 spaces, participants challenge dominant narratives, foreground local perspectives, and articulate
187 alternative understandings of culture, history, and belonging [26, 36]. Thus, digital platforms can
188 support ongoing processes of identity decolonization by enabling participants to reclaim how
189 identities are constructed, represented, and interpreted in relation to colonial legacies.

190 These processes can broadly be conceptualized as identity work, which refers to how individuals
191 construct, negotiate, and maintain their sense of self in relation to social norms, interactions,
192 and institutional contexts [72]. Prior work in HCI and CSCW has shown that online platforms
193 can facilitate such work by providing opportunities for self-expression, community formation,
194 and collective sensemaking [43, 91, 113]. Marginalized communities, in particular, have used
195 these spaces to negotiate and affirm their identities, build solidarity, and contest exclusionary
196

197 norms [4, 41, 42, 45]. In the context of postcolonial societies, such practices often take the form
198 of collaborative efforts to reinterpret history, challenge hegemonic narratives, and reconstruct
199 collective identities in ways that reflect local experiences and perspectives [29, 36, 112]. However,
200 online communities are not neutral or uniformly empowering spaces. Scholars have documented
201 how digital platforms can reproduce and amplify existing social hierarchies, including those based
202 on race [81, 82], gender [57, 131], religion [38, 124], caste [117, 145, 146], and socioeconomic
203 status [83, 129]. Platform features, algorithms, metrics, moderation practices, and patterns of
204 participation can shape whose voices are amplified, whose perspectives are marginalized, and how
205 discourse unfolds [33, 65, 68, 84]. As a result, the same platforms that enable decolonial discourse
206 can also constrain it, producing a dual dynamic of empowerment and limitation [26, 28].

207 Much of the existing work on decolonial discourse and identity negotiation has focused on
208 text-based or discussion-oriented platforms such as Reddit and Quora, where users engage in
209 conversational exchanges and collaborative knowledge production [36, 41]. These studies have
210 highlighted how users collectively construct meaning, negotiate identity boundaries, and develop
211 shared interpretations of sociopolitical issues. However, video-sharing platforms such as YouTube
212 introduce distinct affordances for decolonial discourse and identity work. As a medium, user-
213 generated video enables creators to present embodied and multimodal expressions of identity,
214 combining language, accent, dress, visual aesthetics, and narrative structure [15, 16, 87]. Thus,
215 it can support the formation of online publics around cultural practices, sociopolitical issues,
216 and regional identities, enabling users to connect with dispersed audiences and participate in
217 broader public discourse through platforms such as YouTube [8, 9, 109, 110], TikTok [134], and
218 Vine [10, 106].

219 Recent work has also highlighted how video-based platforms, such as Douyin and Kuaishou, are
220 used by marginalized and non-Western communities to document, preserve, and promote cultural
221 practices, thereby contributing to cultural sustainability and visibility [22, 94]. These practices
222 demonstrate the potential of video-mediated platforms to serve as sites for reclaiming cultural
223 narratives, reimagining communities, and engaging in decolonial discourse. The closest work to
224 this paper is Das and colleagues' study [29], which examines YouTubers' motivations and the types
225 of videos they produce as part of video-mediated decolonial discourse. Their findings show how
226 creators across Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan engage in practices such as travel vlogging, social
227 interviews, reaction videos (videos in which creators record and share their real-time responses to
228 existing media content), political explainers, satire, and YouTube journalism to negotiate fragmented
229 Bengali local and native identities through discussing local culture, history, and politics. In these
230 transnational contexts, such video-based participation can make identity claims more susceptible to
231 scrutiny, contestation, and policing by diverse audiences. Hence, it is important to understand how
232 such discourse is shaped by the dynamics of audience interaction, visibility, platform governance,
233 and state power—which this paper seeks to do.

234 235 **2.3 Platform Governance as a Structuring Force on YouTube**

236 While video-mediated platforms such as YouTube enable new forms of cultural expression and de-
237 colonial discourse [29], they are also structured by governance mechanisms that shape what content
238 is produced, circulated, and sustained. Rather than functioning as neutral infrastructures, platforms
239 operate as sociotechnical systems that organize participation through economic incentives, policy
240 frameworks, and technological affordances [15, 58]. As such, cultural production on YouTube must
241 be understood in relation to the platform's broader political economy and governance structures.

242 YouTube is emblematic of platform capitalism, where value is generated through data extrac-
243 tion, targeted advertising, and the coordination of interactions among creators, audiences, and
244 advertisers [140, 156]. Within this system, content creators are not only cultural producers but also

245

246 participants in a form of platform labor, where visibility, engagement, and monetization are closely
247 intertwined [96, 135]. As a result, creators often strategize their content in response to platform
248 incentives, aligning their production practices with advertiser preferences, audience metrics, and
249 algorithmic visibility [79, 85]. A key dimension of this governance is monetization, which introduces
250 uneven economic incentives across different audiences and regions [44]. Advertising-based revenue
251 models can differentially value audiences based on their geographic location and purchasing power,
252 thereby shaping which audiences are more profitable within the platform ecosystem [79]. For
253 example, it has been reported that YouTube’s ad-revenue payout per thousand impressions can
254 range from less than a dollar in regions such as Bangladesh (\$0.52), India (\$0.96), and Pakistan
255 (\$0.42) to about \$12 in the United States [3]. Such dynamics can influence what kinds of cultural
256 content are prioritized, potentially reinforcing global inequalities in representation and visibility.

257 In addition to economic incentives, content moderation practices play a central role in structuring
258 participation on YouTube [23]. Platform governance is enacted through a combination of formal
259 policies, automated systems, and discretionary enforcement, which together determine what
260 content is permissible, visible, or monetizable [58, 78]. However, prior work has highlighted that
261 these processes are often opaque and inconsistently applied, making it difficult for creators to
262 anticipate or interpret platform decisions [53, 55]. Such opacity can create uncertainty and constrain
263 users’ creative expression, particularly for creators engaging with sensitive or politically charged
264 topics [33, 147], often without even achieving the objective of curbing radical content [70, 121].

265 Copyright governance further complicates cultural production on YouTube, especially for creators
266 producing transformative or derivative content (e.g., reaction videos) [149]. Legal frameworks
267 such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act underpin platform-level mechanisms like notice-
268 and-takedown systems and automated detection tools (e.g., Content ID), which scan uploaded
269 content against proprietary databases [120, 123]. While these systems are designed to protect
270 intellectual property, prior research has shown that creators often struggle to understand and
271 navigate copyright rules in practice, leading to disputes, content removal, and self-suppression in
272 creative expression [51, 52, 54]. These challenges are particularly salient for creators whose work
273 involves remixing, commentary, or critique, where the boundaries of fair use remain ambiguous [55,
274 149]. Given these ambiguities, users and creators develop “folk theories”—informal, experience-
275 based understandings of how platform systems operate—which shape how they navigate visibility,
276 moderation, and participation [39, 47].

277 Beyond platform-level policies, YouTube’s governance ecosystem also includes intermediary
278 actors such as multi-channel networks (MCNs), which introduce additional layers of power and
279 control. MCNs are third-party service providers that affiliate with multiple YouTube channels to
280 offer services, such as audience development, content programming, creator collaborations, digital
281 rights management, monetization, and/or sales [69]. For example, industry reports suggest that up to
282 75% of top-ranking YouTube search results are associated with MCN-affiliated channels [24]. These
283 affiliations are not readily visible to viewers. MCNs are not endorsed by YouTube or Google, but
284 YouTube maintains a list of certified ones [69]. MCNs often provide their services by leveraging their
285 relationships with platforms and advertisers to benefit affiliated creators [62, 92, 153]. However, this
286 intermediary structure can also produce asymmetries, where larger or better-resourced channels
287 gain advantages in visibility, revenue, and dispute resolution, while smaller creators face barriers
288 to participation [132]. Thus, MCNs function not only as support structures but also as gatekeepers
289 that shape the distribution of opportunities and authority within the platform.

290 However, recent research on video-mediated platforms further shows that creators do not simply
291 operate within these systems, instead actively engage with and reshape them through everyday
292 practices. For instance, Simpson et al. demonstrated how creators perform “critical infrastructuring,”
293 modifying and extending platform features to address limitations in accessibility and visibility [133].
294

295 These insights align with broader infrastructural perspectives, which conceptualize platforms as
296 embedded, relational systems that shape and constrain action, often becoming visible only when
297 they break down or are actively reconfigured [122, 141]. In this sense, platform governance operates
298 not only through formal policies or intermediaries, but also through the underlying infrastructural
299 systems that content creators must navigate, adapt to, and reconfigure in practice.

300 Importantly, platform governance does not operate in isolation from broader sociopolitical
301 contexts. Instead, platforms often mediate between users and external regulatory pressures, resulting
302 in complex arrangements where governance is distributed across multiple actors and levels [58].
303 Platforms' regulation over their users is embedded within layered systems of regulation that include
304 legal frameworks, institutional actors, bureaucratic infrastructures, and state influence [50, 61]. In
305 such contexts, content production is shaped not only by platform policies but also by indirect forms
306 of control, including intermediary enforcement, the state's regulatory expectations, and political
307 pressures. These mechanisms, namely monetization policies, moderation practices, copyright
308 regimes, and intermediary institutions like MCNs, together do not simply constrain or enable
309 content creation. They differentially shape whose voices are amplified, whose content is sustainable,
310 and whose claims can be defended within the platform ecosystem. However, existing research
311 has paid limited attention to how these layered forms of governance intersect with postcolonial
312 identity tensions and decolonial discourse, particularly in transnational contexts. In this paper, we
313 examine the challenges YouTube content creators face, including engaging with diverse audiences,
314 navigating platform governance, and contending with state political influence, and how they sustain
315 their work toward decolonial discourse in the face of these challenges.

316 3 METHODS

317
318 This paper is part of a broader multi-platform research project examining how computing systems
319 (e.g., online communities, video-sharing platforms, and algorithmic infrastructures) shape the
320 expression of identities within colonially marginalized communities [CITATIONS REDACTED].
321 While such systems can enable new forms of identity articulation and decolonial discourse, they
322 are also embedded within historical power relations, economic asymmetries, and uneven cultural
323 epistemologies that continue to reflect colonial legacies. In this paper, we focus on how decolonial
324 discourse is sustained on YouTube within the Bengali geocultural context. Specifically, we examine
325 how creators navigate layered sociotechnical constraints arising from audience publics, platform
326 governance, and state-linked intermediaries. We recruited participants from Bangladesh, India, and
327 Pakistan who create YouTube videos related to Bengali identity, culture, and society. These regions
328 provide a critical site of inquiry, as they are shaped by shared colonial histories, post-partition
329 national formations, and ongoing tensions across religious, linguistic, and national identities.

330 Given the effectiveness of video-mediated discourse in these contexts [29], we focus on YouTube
331 as a key site for examining how such discourse is produced, contested, and sustained. YouTube's
332 widespread adoption [73], accessibility to both amateur and professional creators [155], and role in
333 facilitating sociopolitical conversations among marginalized communities [29] make it an appropriate
334 platform for this study. Through a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews,
335 we examine how creators encounter and negotiate social, economic, and political constraints in
336 sustaining decolonial discourse. Prior to conducting this study, we received approval from our
337 university's institutional review board for all materials and procedures.

338 3.1 Recruitment

339
340 Data for this study comes from semi-structured interviews with 15 YouTube content creators
341 residing in Bangladesh, India, or Pakistan. Our eligibility criteria required that participants (1) be
342 18 years or older, (2) actively create YouTube content related to Bangladesh, India, and/or Pakistan,
343

and (3) reside in one of these countries. The first author, who is from Bangladesh and an active YouTube user, brought contextual familiarity to the recruitment and interview process.

We identified participants using a combination of purposive sampling [143] and snowball sampling [60]. Prior works have highlighted that different linguistic, religious, and national identities are central to online decolonial discourse within the Bengali geocultural context [33, 36]. Therefore, we began by searching YouTube using combinations of Bengali identity-related keywords such as *Bengali*, *Bangladesh/Bangladeshi*, *India/Indian*, and *Pakistan/Pakistani*, following approaches used in prior work [33], in both Bengali and English. Although many of the retrieved results were Bengali movies, dramas, and music, since our focus was on discourse, we identified channels that produced commentary-, discussion-, and analysis-oriented content rather than entertainment media such as films or music. We also leveraged YouTube’s recommendation system to identify related channels and expand the diversity of our sample following suggestions from prior work [34]. Additionally, we recruited participants through personal networks and participant referrals.

To contact participants, we collected publicly available contact information from YouTube channel descriptions, including email addresses and social media handles (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). We initially reached out through email with a recruitment flyer describing the study, and followed up after one week if needed. When email contact was unsuccessful, we reached out using social media platforms. Following each interview, we asked participants to recommend additional creators, enabling snowball sampling. Recruitment continued until we reached theoretical saturation, resulting in total 15 participants. Their demographic details are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Identifier	Gender	Country of nationality	Age	Religion	Education	Occupation
P1	Male	India	20-24	Muslim	Bachelor’s	Engineer
P2	Male	India	35-40	Hindu	Master’s	Journalist
P3	Male	Pakistan	25-30	Muslim	Bachelor’s	Student
P4	Male	Bangladesh	25-30	Muslim	Master’s	Journalist
P5	Male	Bangladesh	30-34	Muslim	High school	Freelancer
P6	Female	India	30-34	<i>Did not disclose</i>	Bachelor’s	TV presenter
P7	Male	Bangladesh	30-34	Muslim	Bachelor’s	YouTuber
P8	Male	Bangladesh	30-34	Muslim	Master’s	Journalist
P9	Male	India	40-44	Hindu	Master’s	Govt. employee
P10	Male	Pakistan	25-30	Muslim	Bachelor’s	Engineer
P11	Female	Bangladesh	25-30	Muslim	Master’s	Job Aspirant
P12	Female	India	20-24	Hindu	Bachelor’s	Student
P13	Male	Pakistan	30-34	Muslim	Master’s	Engineer
P14	Male	India	20-24	Hindu	Master’s	Web-developer
P15	Female	India	20-24	Hindu	Master’s	Student

3.2 Interviews

We conducted 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews between Summer 2020 and Summer 2022, following qualitative methodologies outlined by Strauss and Corbin [142] and Yin [154]. Interviews were designed as life histories [152], situating participants’ content creation practices within their broader lived experiences. We began with demographic questions, followed by questions about

393 participants' trajectories into content creation and their experiences engaging with audiences and
394 platforms. We then focused on how participants navigate audience interactions, platform policies
395 (e.g., monetization, copyright, moderation), and the broader sociopolitical contexts that shape
396 their work. This included probing how they manage challenges, maintain presence, and sustain
397 engagement.

398 Given the geographic distribution of participants, interviews were conducted via Zoom or
399 telephone, depending on participants' preferences and connectivity conditions. Participation was
400 voluntary, and participants were not compensated. Prior to each interview, participants provided
401 verbal consent and agreed to be audio-recorded. Interviews were conducted in Bengali, English, or
402 Hindi/Urdu³ based on participant preference. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour 53
403 minutes, with an average duration of approximately 60 minutes. The first author, a native Bengali
404 speaker with bilingual proficiency in English and working proficiency in Hindi/Urdu, conducted
405 all interviews. All interviews were transcribed and, where necessary, translated into English. The
406 first author translated Bengali interviews, while the Hindi/Urdu interviews were translated by a
407 native Hindi speaker. All transcripts were anonymized and de-identified prior to analysis.

408 3.3 Data Analysis

410 We analyzed the data using an inductive, grounded theory-inspired approach [142], commonly
411 used in HCI and social computing research [33, 35, 71]. Following Strauss and Corbin's three-phase
412 approach [142], we conducted open, axial, and selective coding.

413 In the open coding phase, the first author iteratively reviewed transcripts to identify recurring
414 concepts. These open codes were often related to participants' experiences with audiences, platforms,
415 and institutional structures. Examples of open codes included "*audience distrust because of YouTuber's*
416 *demographic identity*", "*accusation of hidden motive*", "*harassment and safety concerns*", "*monetization*
417 *inequality*", and "*platform opacity and uncertainty*". Both authors met weekly to discuss and refine
418 emerging codes. During axial coding, we grouped related open codes into higher-level categories.
419 For example, we merged the first two open codes mentioned earlier under "*tension with the audience*".
420 In the selective coding phase, we examined relationships among these axial codes to develop themes
421 that capture how layered sociotechnical constraints shape the viability of decolonial discourse and
422 how creators negotiate the constraints and challenges related to audience, platform, and state in
423 practice.

424 Since interview data is contextual, consistent with interpretivist qualitative traditions, we did
425 not calculate inter-coder reliability [105, 127]. Our analysis is reflexive and acknowledges that
426 interpretations are shaped by researchers' positionalities and scholarly orientations (see Section 3.4
427 for details about authors' backgrounds) [6]. Thus, our findings reflect both participants' experiences
428 and our interpretive lens grounded in postcolonial and decolonial computing perspectives.

430 3.4 Positionality and Reflexivity Statement

431 When researching marginalized communities, the authors' racial and ethnic backgrounds may
432 influence their perspectives and interpretation [89, 126]. The first author is a cisgender, heterosexual
433 man from the Bengali Hindu minority community in Bangladesh, with a family history affected by
434 refugee crises because of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the liberation war
435 of Bangladesh in 1971. In addition to designing the study, he interviewed participants and led the
436 data analysis. The second author is an Iraqi-American cisgender heterosexual man from a minority
437 group within Iraq who contributed to the study as the anchor author. He was deeply involved
438

439 ³As spoken languages, Hindi and Urdu are mutually intelligible, to the point that they are sometimes considered dialects or
440 registers of a single spoken language known as Hindi-Urdu or Hindustani [14, 25].

442 throughout the study from its initial inception and design through the writing of this manuscript.
443 Given their embeddedness in colonially shaped sociocultural contexts that motivated their research,
444 the authors acknowledge that their work, which focuses on conversations about colonial histories, is
445 inherently political. Both authors' memberships in various minority communities, lived experiences
446 in colonially impacted societies, and prior experience in critical (e.g., decolonial, postcolonial)
447 computing research motivated their study of colonially marginalized communities' practices with
448 technology. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge that the University of X, where this research
449 was conducted, is situated on the land of the indigenous X, Y, and Z [hidden for review] peoples.
450

451 **3.5 Limitations, Future Work, and Ethical Considerations**

452 Postcolonial computing scholars have argued that sociotechnical systems such as YouTube, being
453 designed in the West, can impede the cultural and identity expression of users in the Global South [33,
454 74]. While this paper examines how decolonial discourse is sustained under layered sociotechnical
455 constraints in the context of Bengali culture, we did not look at the algorithmic side of the platforms
456 where these discourses take place. Sociotechnical systems (e.g., recommendation algorithms) can
457 present unique politics by perpetuating algorithmic coloniality or hyper-nationalism [33]. In future
458 work, we plan to examine how algorithmic systems further shape the visibility, reach, and viability
459 of decolonial discourse, as well as how creators navigate these dynamics.
460

461 Another limitation of our study is the lack of gender diversity among participants. Similar to
462 prior work in Bangladeshi contexts [29, 32], we found fewer female YouTubers producing videos
463 within the sociopolitical decolonial discourse space, possibly due to the region's tense political
464 environment [76]. We recruited a few creators from religious minority backgrounds. Beyond the
465 niche nature of local culture content, prior work shows that Bangladeshi minorities' social media
466 participation is shaped by fear and a spiral of silence [124]. Despite multiple attempts, we were
467 unable to recruit a Hindu participant from Bangladesh and included only one Muslim participant
468 from India. The first author, a Bangladeshi Hindu, remained attentive to these dynamics, given that
469 relations between majority and minority religions intersect with political power in South Asia.

470 Moreover, due to the conservative subcontinental culture, despite several focused attempts to
471 recruit more female participants, we were only able to interview four female YouTubers. Among
472 them, two participants requested to be interviewed alongside their YouTube channel's co-patrons
473 on the same call (one cited following Muslim guidelines for women socializing with non-familial
474 men as the rationale for her request). While interviews in a group setting created the possibility
475 that some participants might suppress their opinions or that one participant might dominate the
476 conversation, we did not find any visible hesitancy. The interviewer also strategically navigated
477 the conversation so that all participants in those calls were equally responsive.

478 Again, all but one of our participants had at least a university degree, which raises the possibility
479 that the study may reflect the views of higher-educated people rather than the general population.
480 While all our participants belong to previously colonized communities, they are from age groups
481 that have not experienced the British or the Pakistani colonial rule themselves. Therefore, future
482 work should look into understanding the experiences of people who not only belong to previously
483 colonized communities but also experienced colonial subjugation themselves or faced colonially
484 created crises (e.g., being refugees due to partition or war). When colonization is viewed as a
485 crisis [36], researchers should also consider the risk that older participants will relive traumatic
486 experiences of the colonial past. Since our participants drew on experiences of living in colonially
487 marginalized communities and the ones they heard from older family members, their risk of
488 reliving such traumatic experiences was minimal. Moreover, our participant recruitment is heavily
489 influenced by our search for relevant videos and channels on YouTube. Similar to most qualitative
490

491 research [88], this paper aims not to produce generalizability but rather to examine how decolonial
492 discourse is negotiated within a specific sociotechnical and postcolonial context.

493 4 RESULTS

494
495 We examined how Bengali YouTubers producing sociopolitical content in postcolonial contexts
496 navigate a layered sociotechnical environment shaped by audience tensions, platform governance,
497 and state-linked regulation. Across these layers, participants encounter challenges related to identity,
498 legitimacy, visibility, and control, while developing strategies to sustain their participation through
499 relational labor and infrastructural work.

500 4.1 Audience Publics as Sites of Postcolonial Tension

501
502 Our participants discussed the challenges stemming from their identities that affect their relation-
503 ships with audiences, as well as their strategies for audience management and interaction. We
504 examine these dynamics through the lens of postcolonial tension, which refers to the conflict and
505 struggles for identity, power, and cultural recognition that arise in societies historically shaped
506 by colonial rule and values. Across our interviews, audience publics emerged not simply as pas-
507 sive consumers of content, but as active sites where such tensions are expressed, negotiated, and
508 enforced.

509
510 *4.1.1 Challenges from Fragmented Publics and Legitimacy Policing.* First, we discuss various ways
511 our participants experience challenges in building relationships and interacting with their audience.
512 Tensions among various identities across dimensions such as gender, religion, nationality, language,
513 and cultural practices are a byproduct of this region's colonial past. Because of how colonization
514 has historically shaped and fragmented Bengali societies, YouTubers face challenges in representing
515 the pluralism and intersectionality of Bengali culture.

516
517 *Distrust among Religions.* Religion has historically served as a primary axis of division in the
518 region, fostering heightened distrust among communities [19, 124]. Similar distrust and fragmenta-
519 tion mediate YouTubers' interactions with their audiences. For example, P1 is a Muslim YouTuber
520 from India who makes videos about the positive aspects of Bangladeshi societies and their recent
521 development. However, some of his audiences from his own country have alleged that his videos
522 promote a Muslim-majority country because of his religious identity. Instead of appreciating the
523 YouTubers' efforts, audiences often view their topics and motivations through a lens shaped by
524 postcolonial tension among religious communities.

525
526 Similarly, some of the audiences of Pakistani participants, P3, P10, and P13, abused them for
527 focusing on improving relationships with Bangladesh and India. Their audiences did not appreciate
528 that these YouTubers, being from Muslim-majority Pakistan, wanted to improve relationships with
529 Hindu-majority India. These reactions illustrate how historical and geopolitical tensions continue
530 to shape expectations about who can speak about whom and in what ways.

531
532 *Linguistic and Nationalistic Identities.* Tensions around legitimacy also emerge through linguistic
533 and national identities. For example, P2, a Bengali Hindu YouTuber from India, creates videos
534 critiquing contemporary Indian politics. He described how his Bengali identity is questioned and
535 deemed insufficient to be aligned with Indian nationalism:

536
537 According to them, Bengalis are not Indian enough, so I am not Indian enough.
538 They'll say, "Oh, you are a [common Bengali Hindu surname]!" So, there are two
539 qualifiers [religion and language]. To them, Bengali equals Bangladeshi. ... [Com-
pared to someone speaking a Hindustani language, who critiques state policies],
I am not sent to Pakistan; by the way, I am sent to Bangladesh. So, "not enough"

540 identity is something that I completely resonate with. It is all about identity–“my
541 identity is more than your identity.” (P2, male, India)

542 Unlike the cases we discussed before, here, P2’s videos are not questioned through the lens of
543 religion because he is a Hindu in Hindu-majority India; instead, his Bengali identity is weaponized
544 to abuse him and suspect his videos’ motivation. These fragments and frictions of collective identity
545 pose increasingly difficult challenges due to the transnational character of most of our participants’
546 audiences. Most participants reported that their audiences are primarily from Bangladesh, followed
547 by India and Pakistan, with sizeable additional viewership from diaspora communities in the Gulf,
548 the UK, and the USA. When our participants’ discourses deal with broader regional geopolitical
549 issues, parts of their audience often question their knowledge or intentions through confirmation
550 bias and nationalist sentiment.

551 For example, P9, a history-focused YouTuber, makes videos about the precolonial, colonial, and
552 postcolonial history of Bengal. He talked about how audiences challenge historical narratives that
553 do not align with their prior beliefs, a pattern often established by fragmented narratives in history
554 curricula across different countries [29]. He said:

555 They would say that I was spreading misinformation. Then, I asked them to give
556 the correct information. But, they could not respond. There are also times when
557 something is in history, but they are not willing to accept it. They hold on to their
558 personal, biased beliefs, and they won’t come out of it. (P9, male, India)

559 In some cases, these tensions escalate into coordinated forms of backlash. Participants described
560 instances where geopolitical events triggered collective audience actions. For example, P13 shared:

561 When the standoff with India happened, there was a campaign of Indians unsub-
562 scribing from Pakistani channels, and we were victims of that as well. We lost our
563 4000 subscribers at that moment. (P13, male, Pakistan)

564 Such incidents illustrate how audiences mobilize along postcolonial national identities to regulate
565 discourse and sanction content creators. Hence, YouTubers’ perception of popularity or reception
566 of videos engaging in decolonial or sociopolitical discourse shapes their future content making.

567 *Gendered and Cultural Policing.* Postcolonial tensions also intersect with gender and class, shaping
568 how creators are perceived and treated by audiences. Participants described frequent ad hominem
569 attacks targeting appearance, accent, and dress. Female creators, in particular, faced gendered ha-
570 rassment and safety constraints. For example, P15 talked about several instances of her Bangladeshi
571 male audiences categorizing her sleeveless dress as short and abusing her with vulgar comments.
572 All four of our female participants talked about the gendered aspect of the harassment, obstruction,
573 and fear they face in their content creation. Participant P11 explained how such norms restrict her
574 ability to conduct fieldwork:

575 Many people would certainly obstruct me. They will scold me, saying, “You are a
576 woman, and you came to make videos!” ... I cannot go to collect footage for those
577 videos at night. (P11, female, Bangladesh)

578 Participants also encountered classed and cultural hierarchies in audience responses. For example,
579 P14 described how viewers dismissed certain cultural figures as representing “uncultured village
580 people,” which reinforces the relegation of rural cultural practices in colonial Bengal:

581 Some rebuked us for highlighting [a popular Bangladeshi media personality]’s work.
582 They told us that people in cities do not follow her work and that they are only for
583 the uncultured village people. (P14, male, India)

589 These reactions reflect historically rooted distinctions between elite and subaltern cultural forms,
590 shaping which representations are considered legitimate.

591 Taken together, these dynamics illustrate how audiences enforce boundaries of acceptable identity,
592 knowledge, and cultural representation. Audience publics thus function as decentralized regulators
593 of discourse, shaping both the risks and possibilities of decolonial expression.

594 *4.1.2 Strategies for Conducting Relational Labor and Boundary Work.* In response to these chal-
595 lenges, our participants continue making videos by engaging in ongoing forms of relational labor
596 and audience management. They adapt to fragmented audience expectations by drawing on support
597 networks, aligning with identity norms, and strategically navigating content choices.

599 *Finding Support from Community.* Despite challenges, participants described strong support from
600 their audiences, families, and social networks. This support provides emotional encouragement
601 and, in some cases, material and logistical assistance. For example, P12 described how interactions
602 with viewers foster a sense of belonging:

603 Some say, "Sister, if you come to Bangladesh, come and stay at our home. We will
604 take you to visit different places in Bangladesh." ... It feels like they are my own
605 family members. (P12, female, India)

606 In addition to online encouragement, participants facing safety risks, such as female creators,
607 trusted people in their existing social networks. Besides those who appreciate their content online,
608 they often offer help. For example, P11 described relying on alumni and acquaintances for protection
609 and logistical support:

611 There are many alumni from our university in high-level administration. They can
612 be high-ranked bureaucrats or police officers, but for us, they are like our brothers
613 and sisters. ... We consider whether we can go there safely. (P11, female,
614 Bangladesh)

615 *Following Identity Norms and Customs.* Participants also adapt their self-presentation to align
616 with audience expectations across religious, linguistic, and national identities. This includes using
617 culturally appropriate greetings, languages, and accents to establish affinity. For example, given
618 the variation and strong association of salutations with different religious communities, P3 uses
619 common phrases for Bengali communities and specific ones for Muslims (e.g., *Assalamualaikum*)
620 and Hindus (e.g., *Namaskar*). Some of our participants also start the videos with the primary
621 language, dialect, and accent (e.g., *Bangal* or *Ghoti*) of their audiences. For example, P10 described
622 how using Bengali helps build a connection:

624 Sometimes, I try Bengali in the beginning. It attracts the viewers and makes them
625 feel connected to our channel. ... It's a kind of loving gesture from us. (P10, male,
626 Pakistan)

627 However, since some of our participants (e.g., those from Pakistan) do not speak Bengali as their
628 native tongue, or because the accent of their audience (e.g., Indian Bengali participants who do not
629 speak the Bangladeshi form of the language) differs, they also try to be mindful not to mispronounce
630 the language. Some of them also take help from their friends who speak the languages natively in
631 this task. Participants also provide subtitles, especially when addressing transnational audiences.
632

633 *Deciding on the Dilemma of Content Topics.* To mitigate identity-based tensions, participants
634 strategically decide what topics to engage with. Some participants passionate about the decolonial
635 aspect of their YouTube video-making develop a range of creative strategies. Considering ideological
636 stubbornness as one of the main impediments to political discussions, participant P2 created a
637

638 recurring caricature of a strongly partisan supporter, who depicts a hyperbolic figure holding
 639 uncritical loyalty to a political ideology. Through that character, he speculated, explored, and
 640 demonstrated how his videos could be interpreted in different political echo chambers. For example,
 641 P2 described how that helps him deflect ideological backlash:

642 I used to think about how those could be taken out of context... what logic someone
 643 like [the caricature] would apply to this. Of course, my school and college acquaintances
 644 who share characteristics of that caricature in the WhatsApp group gave me
 645 enough understanding of how they think. ... That is how the whole concept came
 646 around. (P2, male, India)

647 Others (e.g., P13, P14, P15) avoid political or religious discussions altogether or delegate mod-
 648 eration to trusted audience members known through other platforms (We will discuss the multi-
 649 platform practice in the next section). While these strategies reduce conflict and broaden appeal,
 650 they also constrain engagement with issues central to decolonial discourse.

651 Overall, these practices highlight how creators perform continuous boundary work to sustain
 652 their presence on the platform. Rather than operating outside audience dynamics, they actively
 653 negotiate identity, legitimacy, and risk in response to them.

655 4.2 Platform Governance as Postcolonial Structure

656 Our participants discussed various challenges that emerge from the mediation of postcolonial
 657 economic and institutional structures through YouTube. They also explained how they overcome,
 658 overlook, and navigate through these challenges by strategizing their use and presence on online
 659 platforms. In this sense, the platform does not merely host decolonial discourse; it shapes what
 660 kinds of discourse become economically viable, how creators are differentially exposed to copyright
 661 risk, and whose claims are treated as more legitimate within the platform ecosystem.

662
 663 *4.2.1 Challenges from Differential Policies and Institutional Asymmetries.* YouTube's policies deter-
 664 mine how YouTubers' content is moderated, how they are compensated, and who gets recognized
 665 as a content creator. We examine how these dynamics constrain their expressive choices and
 666 reproduce broader postcolonial hierarchies within Bengali sociocultural discourse.

667
 668 *Unequal Monetization System.* Our participants discussed how YouTube's monetization policy
 669 is discriminatory and provides significantly different financial advantages to them based on the
 670 location of their viewers. They explained that because more companies in the Global North advertise
 671 on YouTube than in the Global South, ad revenue in the Global South is lower than in the Global
 672 North. Since one of the motivations for YouTubers is to earn income from their content, platform
 673 capitalism strongly influences their decisions about whom they make content for. For example,
 674 within Bengali communities, our participants prioritize making videos that interest the Bengali
 675 diaspora over local Bengali communities in Bangladesh or India. P14 explained:

676 If someone watches a video from the US or the UK, our earnings will be higher than
 677 those of someone watching it from Bangladesh. The ads on a video depend on the
 678 country [where one is watching from]. The earnings will depend on ad prices in
 679 that country. (P14, male, India)

680 Since YouTubers prioritize the cultural values and practices of the Bengali diaspora living in the
 681 Global North, this normalizes the representation of a particular set of Bengali cultural preferences,
 682 practices, and identities online. The diasporas in these locations represent an archaic or selective
 683 set of Bengali cultural preferences, which does not portray the shifts in local Bengali culture in
 684 Bangladesh and India. This also exacerbates the marginalization of some Bengali communities,
 685 such as rural and agrarian communities, to a subaltern space. While the representation of diasporic
 686

687 practices is important, in prioritizing the diaspora for the sake of higher financial incentives, the
688 YouTubers commodify their viewers from a commercial perspective. Consequently, the platform's
689 differential monetization policies shape what our participants represent in their discourse on
690 Bengali sociocultural topics and issues.

691 *Inconsistent and Opaque Content Moderation.* Contrary to the rationales about how YouTube
692 monetizes videos, our participants were often unclear about many other platform policies. They
693 were often frustrated by the opacity of content moderation, such as deletions or geographic blocks.
694 For example, P14, a participant from India who primarily makes videos about the transnational
695 aspects of Bengali culture, wondered why some of his videos are blocked in Bangladesh while
696 viewers elsewhere can see them. Such uncertainty around whether the audience for whom, or based
697 on whose requests, the YouTubers made certain videos would be able to see them poses a challenge
698 for creators. They often emailed YouTube to ask for clarification about its decision regarding their
699 content. However, they often found YouTube's response to be delayed and unhelpful.

700 In addition, YouTube's moderation process is often hands-off, uncertain, and inconsistent, es-
701 pecially regarding copyright claims. Some of our participants make "reaction videos." Because
702 these videos rely on reusing parts of previously published content, they are particularly prone to
703 copyright claims. Our participants shared that while some channels are lenient toward such content
704 creators, others are more aggressive about claiming copyright. They also described YouTube as
705 taking a hands-off approach to settling copyright claims, often suggesting that content creators
706 resolve disputes among themselves while the platform abides by their decisions.

707 *Multi-Channel Networks' Asymmetric Power.* Our participants highlighted how institutions such
708 as multi-channel networks (MCNs) affect their work. In their opinion, usually more reputable, larger,
709 and more financially solvent YouTube channels join MCNs. They described incidents in which an
710 MCN-member YouTube channel used footage from their videos and later claimed copyright over
711 those same videos. Participant P4 critiques YouTube's copyright policy as "weak" and describes
712 how the prioritization of the claims from MCN-member channels discriminates against them:

713 YouTube blindly trusts one who has MCN. ... YouTube believes that a channel has
714 MCN, so whatever that channel uses belongs to [that channel]. ... You can sometimes
715 be blamed under copyright policy for using your own content. (P4, male,
716 Bangladesh)

717 Based on such incidents, our participants found YouTube to be complicit in reflecting economic
718 hierarchies onto Bengali culture. As frustrated participants perceived a lack of responsibility from
719 YouTube for mediating copyright claims, they viewed YouTube as technologically complicit in
720 hierarchical cultural logic. Especially given the power hierarchy among YouTube channels affiliated
721 with MCNs, our participants proposed that YouTube play a more active role in these matters and
722 leverage video metadata to arbitrate disputes. P11 shared her concern and proposal as follows:

723 Do you think the other party who stole my video will tell YouTube that they stole my
724 content and they are the ones at fault? ... YouTube can easily check who uploaded
725 the content first, but they do not do it. I uploaded a video first, then someone else
726 downloaded it and uploaded it. They make me the party at fault with their power of
727 MCN. (P11, female, Bangladesh)

728 Taken together, these findings show that platform governance operates not only through differ-
729 ential monetization and opaque moderation but also through institutional asymmetries that make
730 some creators' claims more credible and enforceable than others. In that sense, YouTube does not
731 simply mediate decolonial discourse; it stratifies whose discourse can be sustained, defended, and
732 monetized.

733

734

735

736 4.2.2 *Strategies for Navigating Platform Economies and Infrastructures.* Our participants negotiate
 737 among the demands of their audience, the potential for monetization, and the possibility that
 738 their videos will be blocked or claimed for copyright. They often strategize their video-making
 739 by prioritizing non-monetary incentives, acting based on collective folk theories, and utilizing an
 740 ecosystem of multiple platforms.

741 *Prioritizing Non-monetary Incentives.* Because of YouTube's monetization policy, our participants
 742 were likely to earn more by making videos appealing to viewers in the Global North. Considering
 743 the financial potential, making videos for viewers in the Global South locations is not beneficial for
 744 them. However, most of their audiences come from countries like Bangladesh and India. Therefore,
 745 although ad revenue per view from these countries is low, making videos that interest viewers
 746 there often leads to more engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares. Therefore, they often
 747 shift from focusing on the monetary gain from a particular video to using it as an opportunity to
 748 invest in their channels' future growth and reputation.

749 Reaction videos are quite popular among our participants' Bangladeshi and Indian audiences.
 750 Hence, despite these videos' viewers being at low-revenue locations and the possibility of copyright
 751 claims by MCNs, our participants believe that making these reaction videos demanded by their
 752 viewers helps them "build affinity" with their audiences. P15 explained her rationale:

753 In some cases, so many viewers request that we make a reaction video that we must
 754 make one. All our hard work behind that video gets lost because those videos are
 755 not monetized. Even if we sacrifice the money, it will attract many people and help
 756 us gain more subscribers. Therefore, although we are likely to get copyright claims,
 757 we make some videos to gain subscribers. (P15, female, India)

758 By conceptualizing a video's success in terms of non-monetary incentives, our participants
 759 prioritize increasing subscribers and engagement over immediate revenue. Using this strategy,
 760 YouTubers overlook some of the monetization challenges stemming from the platform's policies.

761 *Acting based on Collective Folk Theories.* Due to YouTube's lack of transparency in its policies, the
 762 participants discussed their experiences of being monetarily penalized or having content blocked
 763 with other content creators. Through this, they developed collective folk theories about the reasons
 764 for certain behaviors or decisions by YouTube's algorithms and policies. For example, P4 explained
 765 one of his team's past experiences. They made a video report about a corrupt local officer. To
 766 protect the privacy of a minor victim, they blurred the child's face in that video. When that video
 767 was "yellow monetized"⁴, they wanted to understand the reason. He said:

768 We blurred a kid's face because we did not want to show them. ... [Someone I
 769 consulted with] told me that it happened because I have a blurred face in my video
 770 and suggested removing the blurred face. ... We did not know YouTube would do so.
 771 It is not mentioned anywhere in their policy. Some things with YouTube's policy
 772 are eccentric. They do whatever they want. (P4, male, Bangladesh)

773 Thus, our participants devised various ways to circumvent these hurdles, as understood through
 774 their collective folk theories. For example, they noticed that when using content from other YouTube
 775 channels in their videos, providing detailed credit to the original creator's channel sometimes helps
 776 avoid a copyright claim. However, giving credit to the copyright owners or adding disclaimers
 777 about non-infringement intent was not always sufficient. When they include someone else's videos
 778 within their reaction videos, they intentionally make those semi-transparent or low-resolution.
 779 They believe that this approach gives credit to the original content creators and encourages people
 780

781 ⁴A yellow icon in YouTube Studio indicates limited or no ad revenue for content not meeting advertiser-friendly guidelines.

785 to visit those other content creators' channels, while highlighting their contributions through
786 opinions and reactions.

787
788 *Utilizing a Combination of Multiple Platforms.* Given the understanding that online platforms are
789 subject to different regulatory institutions and policies, a common strategy among our participants
790 was to build a multi-platform ecosystem to disseminate their videos. For example, they often
791 share videos on Facebook, which they believe "is much more easygoing in terms of copyright
792 than YouTube" (P14, male, India). Such a multi-platform approach also helps YouTubers reach
793 viewers of diverse demographic backgrounds. As the same content is regurgitated across multiple
794 platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, it provides YouTubers with multiple revenue streams,
795 helping them overcome the challenges of lower monetization for Global South-related content.
796 While some participants use multiple platforms to post identical content, some strategize by using
797 different platforms for different purposes, such as Facebook groups to build community with their
798 audiences, Facebook pages to share promos of upcoming YouTube videos, Twitter to test the waters
799 on contemporary events and post one-line punches, and Instagram for fun content like memes.

800 *Seeking Alternative Revenue Streams.* Some of our participants also set up online financial plat-
801 forms, such as Patreon, Paytm, and PayPal, associated with their YouTube channels. Different
802 strategies, such as live sessions and merchandise, have provided better financial support for some
803 participants. Besides overcoming financial challenges, these premium channels of interaction also
804 helped them avoid some of the abuses stemming from postcolonial tensions. P2 explains this dual
805 benefit as follows:

806
807 Live sessions act as a revenue source because I answer questions that are paid for.
808 What I have discovered is that people don't pay you money to abuse you, so I get a
809 good bunch of questions from people. (P2, male, India)

810 Overall, these strategies show that participants do not simply endure platform governance; they
811 actively negotiate it. They redefine success beyond immediate monetization, rely on collectively
812 produced practical knowledge to interpret opaque platform behavior, and distribute their presence
813 across platforms to reduce dependence on any single site of control.

814 4.3 State-Linked Regulation and Political Risk

815 Beyond audiences and platform governance, our participants described how state-linked regulatory
816 environments shape their ability to produce and sustain decolonial discourse. These dynamics are
817 not always enacted through direct platform intervention, but often operate through intermediary
818 institutions, informal pressures, and broader political climates. As a result, content creation becomes
819 entangled with concerns about surveillance, registration, access, and personal safety.

820
821 *4.3.1 Challenges from Political Constraints and Intermediary Regulation.* Participants discussed
822 how expressions of identity and opinion, even in seemingly trivial contexts, can become subject to
823 policing and legal scrutiny.

824
825 *Anticipatory Fear and Legal Risk.* Participants particularly described how broader political en-
826 vironments shape their perception of risk through both anticipatory fear and the possibility of
827 punitive legal action. Rather than requiring direct intervention, the mere prospect of state attention
828 influences how creators calibrate their engagement with sociopolitical discourse. For instance, P2
829 emphasized a deliberate effort to avoid visibility to governmental actors:

830
831 We don't fancy that our videos are going to reverberate ... The only thing we wish is
832 that it doesn't go to the government, so that we can live in freedom. If it goes to the
833

834 government, then we are screwed. ... We are afraid of UAPA⁵ being applied, which
835 is the most draconian anti-terror law, and of people being reported to the police. It
836 shows just how bad the situation has become now. (P2, male, India)

837 While several other participants discussed such governmental and political influences, P2 was
838 more concerned, discussed them the most, and elaborated on them in greater detail. Among other
839 participants, P8 and P11 mentioned that their family members frequently discouraged them from
840 producing videos engaging with sociopolitical issues, due to concerns about potential negative
841 repercussions from the government and other political parties.

842
843 *Governmental Control through Intermediaries.* Although none of our participants had been legally
844 charged prior to their participation in our study, they highlighted that state influence is often
845 mediated through institutional intermediaries rather than direct platform enforcement. In particular,
846 MCNs and other formal or semi-formal entities were described as points through which regulatory
847 expectations and pressures are communicated. For example, P2 described how content creators are
848 often required to register or operate through such intermediaries, which in turn become accountable
849 to governmental authorities:

850 If you want to scale up, you need to register yourself. ... And the government does
851 not talk to you directly, they talk to the MCNs. So, MCNs become the body that
852 controls everything. (P2, male, India)

853
854 In this way, MCNs do not function merely as platform-level organizational structures but also as
855 conduits for state oversight. Participants perceived that these arrangements introduce additional
856 layers of control over content production, shaping what can be said and how openly creators can
857 engage with politically sensitive topics. Therefore, they described broader political environments
858 as constraining their work.

859 *Legal Risks' Effects on Collaboration.* In contexts where sociopolitical discourse is contentious, cre-
860 ators expressed concern about surveillance, backlash, and potential repercussions. These concerns
861 extend beyond individual creators to their collaborators and networks. For instance, P2 explained
862 the difficulty of recruiting skilled professionals, like graphics designers and video editors, due to
863 the politically sensitive nature of their content:

864 It is very difficult to find people who are willing to come on camera and talk about
865 these things. People are scared. They don't want to be associated with anything
866 political. (P2, male, India)

867
868 Such constraints limit not only the range of topics that can be addressed but also the forms of
869 storytelling and reporting that are possible. Participants noted that accessing certain locations,
870 institutions, or individuals for content production can be difficult or risky, especially when topics
871 involve a critique of authority or exposure of wrongdoing. In some cases, creators resort to indirect
872 methods or avoid such topics altogether due to these risks.

873 Taken together, these accounts illustrate a spectrum of state-linked pressure, ranging from
874 anticipatory self-censorship to the threat of severe legal consequences. In such contexts, concerns
875 about visibility are not abstract but grounded in the possibility of a disproportionate state response,
876 in which even symbolic or expressive acts may be interpreted as political transgressions.

877
878 ⁵Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) is India's primary anti-terror law designed to prevent unlawful associations
879 and activities threatening national sovereignty [116]. Its amendment in 2019 allows the government to designate individuals
880 as terrorists, not just organizations. It is known for stringent bail conditions, long detention periods without trial, and
881 frequent use against activists and journalists.

883 4.3.2 *Strategies for Managing Risk and Sustaining Participation.* In response to these constraints, our
 884 participants developed strategies to manage political risk while continuing to create content. These
 885 strategies often involve careful calibration of visibility, collaboration, and distribution. One common
 886 approach is to limit direct exposure by controlling how sensitive topics are presented or who is
 887 involved in their production. As noted earlier, some participants avoid explicitly political framing
 888 or rely on indirect narrative techniques. Others selectively collaborate with trusted individuals or
 889 draw on existing social networks to mitigate risk.

890 Participants also emphasized the importance of infrastructural redundancy as a form of protection.
 891 Our participants also have a dominant perception that various online platforms comply with and
 892 enforce certain rules differently. If their videos are deleted from YouTube due to government
 893 decisions, the videos shared on Facebook help them prove to their audience that they indeed made
 894 the requested videos. This also ensures that YouTubers' efforts do not go in vain, irrespective of
 895 how the platforms comply with state requests. P2 explains his strategy to resist technologically
 896 mediated political influence through a multi-platform presence:

897 [YouTube] can de-platform you at any given time without warning. I mean, today,
 898 the government can write one letter and say that YouTube shut this [channel] down,
 899 and they will shut it down. So it is never a good strategy to be on a single platform.
 900 Each video we make on YouTube, we upload it to Facebook the next day. (P2, male,
 901 India)
 902

903 This strategy is not only about audience reach but also about resilience against potential state-
 904 linked interventions. These strategies reflect an ongoing effort to balance visibility and safety. Rather
 905 than withdrawing from public discourse, participants adapt their practices to sustain participation
 906 under conditions of uncertainty and constraint.

907 Overall, state-linked regulation shapes not only what creators can say but also how they organize
 908 their labor, collaborations, and infrastructures. In this sense, decolonial discourse is not only a
 909 matter of representation but also of navigating layered regimes of governance that extend beyond
 910 the platform itself.

911 5 DISCUSSION

912 Our findings show that sustaining decolonial discourse on YouTube is not simply a matter of content
 913 creation, but an ongoing negotiation shaped by audience dynamics, conditions of risk and trust
 914 under state rules and political environment, and the structural constraints of platform governance.
 915 These dimensions intersect to shape what creators can say, how they say it, and whether their
 916 participation can be sustained over time. In this section, we conceptualize decolonial discourse as a
 917 situated practice that requires continuous relational labor, is conditioned by negotiations of risk
 918 and safety, and is structured by misalignments between global platform policies and postcolonial
 919 realities.
 920

921 5.1 Relational Labor under Postcolonial Tension

922 Content creation on social media is generally conceptualized as a form of relational labor, where
 923 creators engage in ongoing interactions with audiences to build trust, maintain visibility, and
 924 sustain engagement [1, 11, 44]. Our findings extend this perspective by showing that, in postcolo-
 925 nial contexts, relational labor involves not only fostering connection but also navigating deeply
 926 rooted sociocultural tensions around identity, legitimacy, and representation, shaped by historically
 927 produced divisions across linguistic practices (e.g., accents and dialects), religion, and nationality.
 928

929 Attending to these dynamics requires a commitment to historicism [138]. The fragmented and
 930 contested audience publics that creators engage with are not incidental but are products of colonial
 931

932 histories that reconfigured social identities, epistemologies, and modes of belonging. As such,
933 relational labor cannot be understood solely as a present-oriented practice of engagement, but
934 must be situated within longer histories of colonialism that continue to structure how identities
935 are recognized, contested, and policed in contemporary digital spaces.

936 Participants did not engage with a single, cohesive audience but with multiple overlapping
937 publics shaped by these historical and sociopolitical divisions. Relational labor, therefore, required
938 continuous calibration of self-presentation and content, including anticipating how different seg-
939 ments of the audience might interpret their work. This extends prior work on affective publics
940 and boundary policing [101, 119] by showing how such processes are intensified in postcolonial
941 settings, where historical divisions persist as active forces shaping interaction.

942 Our findings also position relational labor as a site where postcolonial and decolonial perspec-
943 tives intersect. While these two academic traditions are often treated as distinct [13], especially
944 in computing [37]—with postcolonial scholarship emphasizing the cultural and representational
945 dimensions of identity and discourse, and decolonial approaches foregrounding the material and
946 structural conditions through which coloniality organizes knowledge, power, and participation—our
947 study underscores the importance of examining them in relation to one another. By analyzing how
948 creators produce and sustain decolonial discourse under postcolonial conditions, our work brings
949 these traditions into dialogue, showing how everyday content-creation practices simultaneously
950 engage with questions of representation, epistemic authority, and structural inequality.

951 This labor is both reactive and anticipatory: adjusting language, tone, and framing to align with
952 audience expectations, while also preempting potential backlash or misinterpretation. In this sense,
953 relational labor becomes a form of ongoing negotiation through which creators balance expression,
954 acceptance, and credibility across fragmented and transnational publics shaped by colonial histories.
955 This complicates dominant narratives of participatory culture that emphasize empowerment and
956 connection [12], highlighting instead the sustained effort required to remain legible and acceptable
957 within historically structured and contested sociocultural environments.

958 5.2 Global Platform Policies' Postcolonial Misalignment

960 While platform governance is usually examined in terms of moderation, monetization, and algo-
961 rithmic visibility [15, 58, 140], our findings highlight a critical challenge in postcolonial contexts:
962 the misalignment between globally designed platform policies and local sociocultural, economic,
963 and political realities. Rather than being experienced as a coherent system, platform governance
964 emerges as fragmented, uneven, and at times contradictory.

965 This misalignment reflects a broader concern raised in postcolonial computing, which argues
966 that computing systems are often designed with assumptions rooted in specific cultural, economic,
967 and institutional contexts, and then deployed globally without adequately accounting for local
968 conditions [74]. Such systems can reproduce historical asymmetries by embedding dominant
969 epistemologies and development logics into technological infrastructures. In this sense, platform
970 governance carries implicit assumptions about markets, legality, and participation that may not
971 hold in postcolonial settings. Many governance mechanisms (e.g., monetization and moderation
972 policies), such as those on YouTube, reflect these assumptions.

973 For example, monetization, copyright, and moderation on online platforms are often structured
974 around economic value, formalized legal frameworks, and opaque enforcement processes [44, 51,
975 53, 54, 78, 79]. While these systems function within the platform's broader economic and legal
976 logic, their underlying assumptions do not align with the conditions under which creators in
977 postcolonial contexts operate. This misalignment produces a set of contradictions that creators
978 must navigate. For instance, monetization incentives encourage targeting Global North audiences,
979 while creators' primary cultural and social commitments lie with Global South communities.

980

981 Moreover, the incentives to prioritize the Global South diasporas living in the Global North over
982 the non-migrant communities illustrates the former's "diasporic superposition" [35]. Copyright
983 enforcement is experienced as inconsistent and mediated by institutional asymmetries, such as
984 the influence of multi-channel networks (MCNs), which can amplify some creators' claims while
985 undermining others [92, 132]. At the same time, moderation opacity introduces uncertainty about
986 content visibility and accessibility, making outcomes difficult to anticipate and hence, to agree
987 on [33]. As a result, governance is not experienced as a stable or universally legible system [130],
988 but as a set of unevenly enforced mechanisms that require continuous interpretation.

989 Given the need for interpretation under opacity, participants described relying on collective folk
990 theories to interpret platform behavior, such as diversifying their presence across multiple platforms
991 to mitigate risk, and seeking alternative revenue streams to compensate for monetization disparities.
992 These practices resonate with postcolonial computing's call [74] to generatively attend to how users
993 in postcolonial contexts adapt, reinterpret, and sometimes resist imposed technological structures.
994 They also align with prior work on user adaptation to opaque systems [39, 47], while extending
995 it to account for transnational inequalities and postcolonial conditions. Our findings emphasize
996 that platform governance travels globally, but its assumptions do not. In postcolonial contexts, this
997 results in a form of governance misalignment, where policies designed for one set of conditions
998 are enacted in environments where those conditions do not hold. Sustaining decolonial discourse,
999 therefore, requires not only engaging with platform rules but also continuously reconciling the
1000 gaps between those rules and the lived realities of creators and their audiences.

1001 5.3 Risk, Trust, and Safety in Postcolonial Participation

1002 Beyond maintaining relationships with audiences, our findings show that participation in decolonial
1003 discourse is shaped by ongoing negotiations of risk, trust, and safety. Beyond harassment and safety
1004 concerns in online spaces documented by prior scholarship [77, 100], our findings highlight how
1005 these dynamics are intensified and reconfigured in postcolonial contexts, where identity, politics,
1006 and legal structures intersect. For our participants, visibility was not only an opportunity for
1007 engagement but also a source of vulnerability. In addition to audience backlash and identity-based
1008 harassment, the content creators we interviewed faced risks of broader sociopolitical and legal
1009 consequences for engaging with sensitive topics. These risks were often anticipatory rather than
1010 reactive. Even in the absence of direct intervention, the possibility of state attention, legal action, or
1011 institutional scrutiny shaped how creators calibrated their participation. In this sense, risk operates
1012 not only through explicit enforcement but also through the anticipation of potential consequences,
1013 conditioning what can be expressed, how it is framed, and whether it is expressed at all.

1014 These dynamics extend beyond individual creators to their collaborators, networks, and produc-
1015 tion processes. The perceived risk of association with politically sensitive content creates barriers
1016 to collaboration, limits access to resources, and constrains forms of storytelling and reporting.
1017 Such conditions reflect what has been described as chilling effects [125], where the threat of legal
1018 or political repercussions discourages participation even without direct enforcement. As a result,
1019 content creators may resort to indirect expression, avoid certain topics altogether, or limit the scope
1020 of their engagement. Trust plays a central role in mediating participation under these conditions.
1021 YouTubers described actively working to build and maintain trust with their audiences through
1022 linguistic alignment, cultural signaling, and consistent engagement, while also navigating distrust
1023 rooted in fragmented postcolonial identities [19].

1024 Trust is thus not given but continuously negotiated, and remains fragile in environments where
1025 audiences may question motives, authenticity, or allegiance. This aligns with prior work on trust
1026 and credibility in online communities [107, 115], but extends it by showing how trust is entangled
1027 with postcolonial identity politics, transnational audience formations, and conditions of uncertainty.
1028

1029

Safety, in turn, is unevenly distributed and structurally constrained. Female creators and those engaging with contentious sociopolitical issues faced heightened exposure to both social and political risks, shaping their mobility, content choices, and modes of engagement. This aligns with prior social computing scholarship [124] showing how postcolonial memory shapes a politics of fear that constrains online participation among users from religious minority communities. Moreover, the absence of clear protections or recourse mechanisms within platform and institutional structures further exacerbates these vulnerabilities. These findings suggest that decolonial discourse is shaped not only by what creators wish to express but also by what can be safely articulated within environments marked by anticipatory fear, legal uncertainty, and unequal exposure to harm.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper examined how YouTubers sustain Bengali decolonial discourse within a layered sociotechnical environment shaped by audience dynamics, platform governance, and state-linked regulation. Showing that such discourse is not merely content creation but a situated, collective practice, our findings underscores the need to move beyond platform-centric accounts of participation toward an integrated perspective that accounts for how historically rooted tensions, transnational audience formations, and uneven governance structures shape the viability of online expression. This highlights that supporting discourse in an ethnolinguistic group living within postcolonial contexts requires attention not only to interfaces and policies but also to the relational, political, and infrastructural conditions that make participation possible or fragile. More broadly, our work underscores that designing for global platforms entails engaging with the diverse and historically situated realities of their users, pointing toward more contextually grounded and equitable approaches to platform design and governance.

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