SPITFIRE
SPARK CHANGE

Video platforms like TikTok and YouTube are the next frontier of media and in spite of their reported precarity at times, they will continue to be a means by which millions of people receive information. Content creators are the engines that make them run. Creators who make, edit and post videos on these platforms are building authentic relationships with audiences online that lead not just to high view rates, but sustained engagement. At a time when people across the political spectrum can't seem to find common ground and trust in traditional news media is at an all time low, social justice movements needs to lean into partnerships with these content creators to educate and activate audiences on pressing social issues.

Spitfire partnered with Impact Guild, supported by MacArthur Foundation, to conduct a landscape review with organizations, connector hubs and content creators on the state of creators' engagement on social issues today. We were curious about what content creators need to do more of this work and to do it well, how to ensure it's sustainable for them given that for many content creation is their livelihood and how they might be able to deliver content at scale.

We surveyed more than 50 diverse content creators and interviewed 17 experts in the field to help answer these questions and map the existing ecosystem at the intersection of social justice and the creator economy.

Key findings include:

1. Content creators get started for different reasons and care about a variety of issues, but many are inspired to make an impact.

2. Content creators are most likely to post about social justice issues when they care about an issue, have access to trusted information on the topic and have financial support to create engaging content about it.

3. There are many structural barriers that make it hard for content creators to post about social issues, including platform precarity, ever-shifting community guidelines and online harassment.

4. While social media platforms have democratized information, in the end the mega media companies that own them make the rules – deciding what can be posted and by whom. This has serious implications for content creators, especially for creators who post about social justice issues and who come from marginalized communities.

5. Creators feel they could accomplish more with adequate, sustained financial resources but the rhythmic provision of information, facts, expertise and thought partnership from nonprofit organizations is equally important.

6. There is substantial room for growth for social justice organizations to partner effectively with content creators, including investing more resources into partnerships with content creators and being more flexible with messaging.

7. Content creators need long-term support and sustainable ecosystems to thrive and make a bigger impact. Some models exist, but additional investment and innovations are needed to take the field to the next level.

Building on our research findings, we have identified a number of promising efforts that could help take the field to the next level. Recommendations fall into five buckets:

1. **Gather:** actions that foster community and allow for cross-pollination of ideas to become programmatic. Example: virtual social justice TikTok House.

2. **Catalyze:** actions that support content creators to make social justice content at scale. Example: creator fellowships for creators to do a deep dive on a particular issue.

3. **Expand:** actions that tap into the energy of existing efforts, with "guardrail organizing." Example: invest in models that are already working, like Better Internet Initiative, so they can grow their reach.

4. **Upskill:** actions that help nonprofits and social justice organizations partner effectively with content creators. Example: provide trainings for nonprofits on how to effectively partner with content creators.

5. **Unite voices:** collective actions that push social media platforms to change policies and practices so they're more fair to content creators. Example: create a Content Creator's Bill of Rights.

It's clear that whichever actions the field decides to pursue, they need to center equity, in both what (content) and who (content creators) we invest in, offer opportunities for content creators to build community and support long-term trusting partnerships between content creators and social justice organizations.

If we work together, we can change the game – making it easier for content creators to do their work while sparking change on the most pressing issues of our time.

A full 30+ pages report for which this summary reflects will be **available** Spring 2023.

To learn more about this research and our findings, please contact creatorlab@spitfirestrategies.com