

Original Article

Vlogger na ba ang tanan?: Investigating the Lived Experience of Becoming One among Emerging Filipino Vloggers in Algorithmic Spaces

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Abstract

Background: *Vlogging has become a dominant form of digital expression. However, the meaning of becoming a vlogger, particularly how identity is constructed and negotiated within algorithmic spaces, remains underexplored among emerging Filipino content creators in Southern Philippines.*

Methods: *This study employed an interpretative phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of 10 emerging vloggers from diverse occupational and content backgrounds. Data were gathered through multimodal interviews and online form responses, based on a common interview guide, and analyzed using idiographic engagement and thematic integration. A theme-excerpt matrix supported analytic transparency.*

Results: *Three interrelated themes emerged. First, motivations included emotional coping, recognition and social validation, financial aspirations to help others, and self-rediscovery. Second, challenges involved platform constraints, role conflict, burnout, technological barriers, and public criticism. Third, identity construction reflected negotiations of authenticity, performance for visibility, and adaptation to algorithmic demands.*

Conclusion: *Becoming a vlogger signifies inhabiting a layered identity – sincere yet staged, personal yet continually reshaped by platform demands. Through dramaturgical and uses and gratifications lenses, vlogging emerged as identity work and meaning-making that fulfill emotional, social, and economic needs. The study theorizes vlogging as dramaturgical identity work embedded in platform economies, enriching scholarship on digital labor, identity, and authenticity.*

Keywords

communication, content creation, digital landscape, meaning-making, social media, Philippines, vlogging, UN SDG 8, decent work and economic growth

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, self-expression and content creation have become increasingly accessible. Smartphones, internet connectivity, and video-sharing platforms allow individuals from diverse backgrounds to produce and share personal narratives online (O'Byrne, 2019). Vlogging, a form of video blogging, has emerged as

a prominent medium for documenting, reflecting, or entertaining through personal or thematic content (Zhang & Lee, 2023). Globally, vlogging has transformed from a niche hobby into a cultural phenomenon, shaping new forms of digital labor, online celebrity, and participatory media. Social media can amplify local or national phenomena to global attention, as seen in events like the Arab Spring and viral sensations such as Psy's "Gangnam Style" (Velez & Abadiano, 2016). Platforms like Instagram also influence audience behavior through interactive engagement, affecting decisions such as tourist choices in India (Chawla et al., 2024).

In the Philippines, where social media usage is among the highest in the world (ABS-CBN News, 2021; Antivola, 2024), vlogging has likewise grown rapidly. It has become common to see individuals recording snippets of daily life and uploading them to platforms such as Facebook. From makeup tutorials and daily routines to political commentaries and travel diaries, Filipino vloggers have carved unique spaces in the online landscape. In particular, emerging content creators in Mindanao, the southern Philippines, have demonstrated creative approaches to personal storytelling, cultural preservation, and audience engagement. This growing visibility is reflected in the popular Cebuano social media meme, "*Vlogger na ba ang tanan?*" (loosely translated as "Is everyone a vlogger now?"), which captures a generation's fascination with digital presence, self-expression, and online visibility. Local creators such as Cong TV, a popular YouTube content creator, document personal experiences and opportunities, while innovative formats like MonoVlogs illustrate the adaptability of vloggers in connecting with diverse audiences (Aquino & Cabalquinto, 2025; De Vera & Saludadez, 2021; Jalagat, 2022; Jaucian, 2024; Serquiña, 2023).

Global studies suggest that a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drives vlogging. Intrinsic to it is identity construction, self-expression, and social interaction. Bilingual couples use vlogging to explore hybrid identities and intercultural experiences (Stepkowska & Buczek, 2023), while mom vloggers document daily routines to define values beyond domestic roles (Zhou et al., 2023). Cultural preservation also motivates some vloggers, particularly ethnic minorities who use content creation to sustain language and identity within their communities (Chen et al., 2023). Extrinsic motivations include financial rewards and audience engagement, as many vloggers rely on monetization opportunities on platforms like YouTube or cultivate loyal audiences that can enhance brand trust and marketing potential (Zhang, 2018; Zhou et al., 2023).

Despite these benefits, vlogging presents notable challenges. Algorithmic limitations affect visibility and reach, particularly for mom vloggers (Zhou et al., 2023; Wan et al., 2025). Balancing content creation with personal and professional responsibilities can lead to stress and burnout (Zhou et al., 2023), while privacy concerns compel vloggers to carefully manage what they share online (Stepkowska & Buczek, 2023). Technical limitations and hostile audience feedback further complicate content creation, affecting both production quality and emotional well-being (Maity & Rakat, 2018; Tang et al., 2023).

Vlogging also serves as a performative medium for identity construction through language, visuals, and behavior. Creators manipulate camera angles, facial expressions, and body language to shape perception. Gender, cultural, and hybrid identities are expressed in ways that reflect personal and social narratives (Cheong et al., 2025; Farrukh et al., 2021; Raun, 2015). Vloggers negotiate platform norms and algorithmic demands while maintaining authenticity and credibility, often switching between roles such as storyteller, character, and creator (Bishop, 2018; De Fina & Koh, 2024; Wang, 2023). Multilingual and intercultural practices further allow vloggers to reach diverse audiences and express hybrid identities (Codreanu & Combe, 2018; Stepkowska & Buczek, 2023).

Despite the growing prominence of vlogging as a form of digital participation, there remains a lack of empirical studies focusing on the lived experiences of vloggers in Mindanao. In particular, no study has yet examined what it means to become a vlogger as a situated, everyday practice within this regional context. Addressing this gap, the present study foregrounds the lived experiences of emerging Filipino vloggers in Mindanao, highlighting how they articulate their motivations for content creation, negotiate structural and affective challenges within algorithmically governed platforms, and continuously construct and perform their identities in online spaces. Guided by an interpretative phenomenological orientation, the research emphasizes idiographic depth and interpretative engagement, moving beyond descriptive categorization to

theorize vlogging as identity work. Anchored in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Katz et al., 1973), vloggers are understood as active participants who pursue emotional, social, and economic needs through content creation. Dramaturgical Theory (Goffman, 1959) further frames vlogging as performance, where creators manage frontstage personas for visibility while concealing backstage selves shaped by fatigue, grief, or criticism. These frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for interpreting how authenticity, monetization, and visibility are negotiated, and for asking the central question of this study: What is the meaning of being a vlogger in the construction of identity under algorithmic governance?

METHODS

Study Design, Population, Setting

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of the emerging Filipino vloggers. An interpretative phenomenological orientation guided the inquiry, emphasizing lived experience, subjective meaning, and interpretative engagement (Smith et al., 2009). While the study drew on principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), such as idiographic attention and the double hermeneutic of researchers interpreting participants' interpretations, the analytic strategy also incorporated thematic integration across cases. In this sense, the design balanced detailed case-by-case engagement with the identification of shared experiential patterns, positioning the study between idiographic depth and interpretative thematic analysis.

The study focused on vloggers in Mindanao, southern Philippines. The researchers used purposive sampling to recruit information-rich participants aged 18 and above who had been actively creating content for at least four months but not more than three years. Vloggers were defined as individuals who consistently produce video content, publicly share it on social media, and engage with audiences. The team conducted the recruitment through Facebook networks and direct messages. They made an effort to include participants from varied niches, occupations, and audience reach, although the final sample of ten was relatively homogeneous, predominantly female educators. The team acknowledged that this limitation affects transferability. Data collection continued until information power and thematic sufficiency were achieved, with saturation determined by the absence of new experiential insights or interpretative patterns (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Collection

Participants indicated their preferred mode of participation: three opted for face-to-face interviews, two for video conferencing, and five for asynchronous online form responses. This multimodal approach provided flexibility in accommodating participants' varying schedules, availability, and levels of access to communication technologies, while maintaining the depth and richness of qualitative data collection. The approach is consistent with qualitative research guidance that recognizes the value of flexible and context-sensitive data collection methods (Braun et al., 2021; Janghorban et al., 2014; Salmons, 2015).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews explored participants' experiences, focusing on motivations, challenges, and identity construction. The researchers used the same interview guide across formats to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Synchronous interviews lasted 40–60 minutes and enabled probing and clarification. For asynchronous participation, the guide was adapted into an online form with identical open-ended questions, providing participants ample opportunity to elaborate. Recognizing that written responses may lack spontaneity, the team reviewed the submissions carefully and clarified with participants when needed. During analysis, asynchronous responses were interpreted alongside interview data, with sensitivity to differences in richness across modalities.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and translated from Cebuano to English. All interview transcripts, including online form responses, were analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological orientation (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Each case was examined individually through repeated readings, detailed noting (descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual), and the development of emergent themes. Themes were then clustered into superordinate

categories across cases, reflecting the double hermeneutic – researchers making sense of how participants made sense of their experiences.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through peer debriefing, reflexive memo-writing, and an audit trail documenting coding decisions and interpretative reflections. These strategies strengthened credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Although each participant’s account was initially analyzed ideographically, the final presentation privileges thematic convergences across cases to illuminate common experiential meanings. This positioning acknowledges that while IPA principles informed the study, its analytic emphasis leaned toward interpretative thematic integration.

Ethical Considerations

The University Research Ethics Committee approved this study. It gave informed consent from all participants through signed forms (face-to-face), verbal agreement (online interviews), or click-to-consent (online forms). To protect anonymity, participants were assigned pseudonyms, and potentially identifiable details such as occupation, content niche, follower counts, and demographic characteristics were generalized or aggregated in reporting. For example, follower counts were rounded or presented as ranges, occupational roles were described broadly, and content niches were grouped into categories without reference to specific channels. All data were anonymized, stored securely, and accessible only to the research team. Participation was voluntary, and individuals could withdraw at any time without consequence. These measures ensured confidentiality and safeguarded participant identity while allowing sociodemographic information to contextualize findings.

RESULTS

The ten participants were emerging Filipino vloggers in their mid-twenties to early thirties, with women comprising the majority of the sample. Most participants had completed a college degree and were primarily employed as educators, although the group also included other professionals and students. Their vlogging experience ranged from several months to a few years, reflecting varying stages of engagement in content creation. Participants produced content across diverse categories, including lifestyle, education, food, travel, parenting, entertainment, and spirituality, and commonly used Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok as their primary platforms. Audience reach ranged from several thousand to tens of thousands of followers, and posting schedules typically included multiple posts each week. This relatively homogeneous profile in terms of age, educational attainment, and professional background provided a coherent context for IPA. Consistent with [Ahmed \(2025\)](#), the research team considered the inclusion of ten participants sufficient to generate rich, in-depth accounts of the lived experiences under investigation.

Table 1. *Sociodemographic Profile of the Participants*

Characteristic	Description
Age Range	Mid20s to early30s
Sex	Majority female participants
Educational Attainment	Most were college graduates
Main Occupation	Predominantly educators, alongside other professionals and students
Vlogging Experience	Several months to a few years
Content Categories	Lifestyle, education, food, travel, parenting, entertainment, and spirituality
Platforms Used	Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok
Approximate Audience Reach	Several thousand to tens of thousands of followers
Posting Frequency	Multiple times weekly

Table 2. *Themes and Sub-Themes in the Vlogging Experiences of Emerging Filipino Vloggers*

Theme	Subtheme	Description	Illustrative Excerpt
Motivations for Vlogging	Emotional Coping as Narrative Reconstruction	Vlogging reframed grief and struggles into communicable stories, turning trauma into testimony.	"Sir John told [pseudonym] me that I should start vlogging to cope with the pain of my father's death." (Vlogger 1)
	Recognition as Social Validation	Metrics such as views and likes were lived as affirmations of social presence and belonging.	"Then when I got more views and comments on my videos, I said, 'Oh, there are people who actually watch these?'" (Vlogger 1)
	Financial Aspiration to Help Others	Monetization was interpreted as livelihood tied to altruism and social responsibility.	"My first goal is to earn a lot of money from vlogging... I aspire to emulate famous vlogger C who generously distributes money to those in need." (Vlogger 2)
	Passion as Rediscovery of Self	Vlogging became a mirror for rediscovering talents and preserving identity continuity.	"I want to showcase my talents in making crafts and art." (Vlogger 5)
Challenges in Vlogging	Platform Constraints as Disempowerment	Algorithmic rules and copyright restrictions were experienced as loss of autonomy and precarious labor.	"I mostly have issues in copyright for the background music... I have to take down the whole video to avoid issues." (Vlogger 1)
	Role Conflict as Fractured Identity	Competing demands from family, work, and vlogging fragmented participants' sense of self.	"Creating content isn't easy, especially when you're a mom. There are times I can't work out or edit videos because my baby is sick." (Vlogger 8)
	Burnout as Emotional Exhaustion	Exhaustion was lived as challenges to identity continuity.	"It can be mentally exhausting, and at times, it even affects your mental health." (Vlogger 6)
	Technological Barriers as Creative Limits	Limited resources and unstable internet constrained self-expression and continuity.	"One of the challenges is not having a mic, no signal, and having a low-quality phone." (Vlogger 4)
	Public Criticism as Threat to SelfWorth	Hostile feedback undermined confidence and destabilized authenticity.	"Yes, there are bashers. For example, when you go live and say something like, 'Let's eat!' someone might comment, 'Go eat by yourself then.'" (Vlogger 3)
Identity Construction in the Vlogging Space	Authenticity as Paradox	Authenticity was lived as sincerity entangled with performance, where being "real" was inseparable from staging for visibility.	"You have to show on social media that you're happy, even if sometimes you're really not." (Vlogger 3)
	Performance for Visibility	Identity was enacted through role-play and selective disclosure, shaped by audience expectations in the attention economy.	"Who I am in real life is exactly who I am in my vlogs." (Vlogger 7)
	Algorithmic Adaptation	Offline roles were extended into digital personas, continuously reshaped by platform rules and algorithmic pressures.	"Technically, I'm a teacher, so the language I use in my vlogs is different from how I speak in the classroom." (Vlogger 10)

The results are organized into three overarching themes that illuminate how vloggers made sense of their lived experiences: motivations for vlogging, challenges in vlogging, and identity construction in the vlogging space. Each theme is further broken down into subthemes that capture the nuanced ways participants attached meaning to their creative pursuits, confronted structural and emotional pressures, and negotiated their identities within algorithmically governed platforms. To demonstrate analytic transparency, Table 2 presents illustrative excerpts from the integration alongside descriptions, showing how lived accounts were interpreted into themes. This expanded presentation highlights the interpretative phenomenological process, grounding the analysis in participants' voices while revealing how authenticity, recognition, and performance were continuously negotiated in digital spaces.

Motivations for Vlogging

Participants described vlogging as a deeply personal and purposeful activity in which emotional release, social validation, financial pursuit, and passion converge. Motivations were not isolated but intertwined, with coping strategies blending into aspirations for recognition and livelihood. Vlogging is both a creative outlet and a survival mechanism, shaping how participants reconstruct their experiences and identities.

Emotional Coping as Narrative Reconstruction

Accounts of emotional coping suggest that participants experienced vlogging as a way of transforming private pain into communicable narratives. Vlogger 1 shared, *"Sir John [pseudonym] told me that I should start vlogging to cope with the pain of my father's death."* His reflection can be interpreted as showing how vlogging functioned as a ritual of healing, reframing grief into a story that could be shared. Vlogger 10 added, *"Like when somebody cheats on you. Instead of sharing it with friends, some people prefer to post it on Facebook."* This perspective appeared to highlight how vulnerability was redirected into digital testimony, where personal struggles were reconstructed into visible accounts. These narratives may indicate that participants were not simply "expressing" emotion but actively re-authoring painful experiences into forms that offered control and visibility. Hence, vlogging can be understood as a practice of narrative reconstruction, in which trauma is reshaped into testimony and self-representation.

Recognition as Social Validation

Audience engagement carried meanings beyond numerical measurement among the participants. Vlogger 1 recalled, *"Then when I got more views and comments on my videos, I said, 'Oh, there are people who actually watch these?'"* His account may suggest that metrics were interpreted as affirmations of social presence, signaling that his content was being noticed. Vlogger 4 echoed this sentiment, stating, *"They also give me motivation, especially when they look for my vlogs, because there are times when it really gets discouraging."* This reflection can be interpreted as showing how reactions and comments served as encouragement, reinforcing a sense of connection with online communities. These accounts may indicate that views, comments, and reactions were not merely abstract indicators but rather signs of visibility and acknowledgment. Engagement appeared to contribute to feelings of validation, suggesting that social presence was co-constructed through audience recognition.

Financial Aspiration to Help Others

For several participants, earning through vlogging may have been experienced as holding significance beyond personal gain. Vlogger 3 reflected, *"So far, I've already started earning, but it's still a small amount, around 16.37 US dollars."* This modest figure may be interpreted as symbolic proof of value, where even limited income was experienced as recognition of effort. Vlogger 2, meanwhile, expressed a broader aspiration: *"My first goal is to earn a lot of money from vlogging... I aspire to emulate famous vlogger C, who generously distributes money to those in need."* Her account can be understood as showing how financial goals were intertwined with values of generosity and reciprocity. These reflections may indicate that monetization was not only about sustaining oneself but also about supporting family members or assisting others in need. Therefore, financial

aspirations may be interpreted as having both economic and social significance, in which income is imagined as a resource for community support as much as for personal livelihood.

Passion as Rediscovery of Self

Passion for vlogging was experienced as both a creative rediscovery and a sense of identity continuity. Vlogger 5 reflected, *"I want to showcase my talents in making crafts and art."* Her account suggests that vlogging served as a way to uncover hidden or forgotten skills. Meanwhile, Vlogger 9 described content as *"something I can look back on someday, like memories on Facebook."* This reflection can be interpreted as showing how vlogging became a form of self-preservation, curating identity across time. These responses suggest that vlogging was not only directed toward external audiences but also toward internal self-making. It seemed to operate as a mirror for rediscovering aspects of self, offering continuity across personal history. Passion may, therefore, be understood as a lived archive of selfhood: a phenomenological record of "who I am."

Challenges in Vlogging

While vlogging offered opportunities for expression and connection, participants consistently highlighted the burdens it imposed. Challenges appeared to be experienced as structural, emotional, and existential pressures, spanning from algorithmic restrictions and technological barriers to role conflicts and hostile feedback. These difficulties may be understood not merely as obstacles but as lived threats to agency, identity, and well-being, underscoring the precarious nature of digital labor in regional contexts.

Platform Constraints as Disempowerment

Vlogger 1 lamented, *"I mostly have issues with copyright for the background music... I have to take down the whole video to avoid issues."* This account may suggest that copyright rules were experienced as a loss of creative autonomy. Vlogger 3 added, *"Being restricted is a big deal... your income decreases, particularly from ad revenue and video ads."* These reflections can be interpreted as showing how algorithmic governance appeared to function as external control over personal meaning-making. The interpretative insight may be that platform rules were not simply abstract regulations but were lived as disempowerment, limiting creators' agency over their narratives and livelihoods. Such accounts suggest to indicate that vlogging was experienced as precarious labor, contingent on opaque algorithmic forces.

Role Conflict as Fractured Identity

Balancing multiple responsibilities complicated participants' vlogging experience. Vlogger 8 reflected, *"Creating content isn't easy, especially when you're a mom. There are times I can't work out or edit videos because my baby is sick, and on top of that, I still have to manage the business."* Her account suggests that identity was stretched across competing roles, where creative work intersected with familial and professional obligations. Meanwhile, Vlogger 3 described staying up late to edit, noting, *"The negative side is that sometimes, creating content takes time away from doing assignments. In fact, creating content often consumes more time, impacting your studies and daily responsibilities."* This reflection can be interpreted as showing how economic motivation blurred boundaries between personal time and digital labor. These narratives suggest that role conflict extended beyond scheduling difficulties to deeper tensions in sustaining coherence across different identities. Ergo, vlogging may be understood as a practice that both enabled self-expression and introduced strain, requiring participants to negotiate overlapping expectations as parents, workers, students, and creators.

Burnout as Emotional Exhaustion

Declining audience engagement weighed heavily on participants' sense of purpose. Vlogger 4 reflected, *"There are times when it really gets discouraging,"* a statement that may suggest burnout was tied not only to reduced motivation but also to deeper questions about the value of his online presence. The decline in interaction can be interpreted as prompting him to reconsider the significance of the persona he had carefully developed, suggesting that digital performance is intertwined with self-worth. Vlogger 6 added, *"It can be*

mentally exhausting, and at times, it even affects your mental health." This account may indicate that burnout was experienced as a gradual depletion of emotional resources, in which the sustained effort of producing content and maintaining visibility weakened the meaning of vlogging. All these reflections appear to highlight that burnout involves more than physical fatigue. For some, prolonged attempts to meet audience expectations seemed to generate emotional strain and discouragement, suggesting difficulties in sustaining motivation and a coherent sense of purpose in their creative work.

Technological Barriers as Creative Limits

For participants, limited access to resources shaped both the process and their perceptions of the content. Vlogger 4 explained, *"One of the challenges is not having a mic, no signal, and having a low-quality phone. If your phone is low quality, the engagement you get from people will also be low because most viewers prefer to see and watch high-quality content from you."* His account can be interpreted as showing that technology was not simply a neutral tool but a condition that influenced how identity was performed in digital spaces. The quality of the equipment seemed to affect not only production but also the perceived legitimacy of their online presence. Vlogger 3 added another dimension, noting unstable internet connectivity as a recurring challenge. This reflection may suggest that technological limitations disrupted the consistency required for visibility, interrupting routines and weakening audience connection. These responses suggest that technology was experienced as both enabling and restricting: while it provided the means to participate, its inadequacies constrained creative continuity and the stability of digital personas.

Public Criticism as Threat to Self-Worth

Negative feedback held a strong emotional weight for participants. Vlogger 3 shared, *"Yes, there are bashers. For example, when you go live and say something like, 'Let's eat!' someone might comment, 'Go eat by yourself then.'"* This account may suggest that criticism was experienced not simply as disagreement but as a challenge to personal identity and authenticity. The public nature of online interactions seemed to intensify this vulnerability, exposing performances to immediate judgment. In contrast, Vlogger 1 described a more confrontational response: *"I actually like entertaining my bashers, and I even exchange messages in the comments section. I visit their account, screenshot the content, then use it as a reply to their comment with some nasty captions."* His strategy can be interpreted as reclaiming agency, transforming hostile encounters into opportunities for resistance and performance. These accounts suggest that public criticism influenced both confidence and creative practice. For some, negative feedback seemed to erode self-worth, while for others it became material for reasserting control. Such experiences may highlight how audience judgment was deeply entangled with identity negotiation in digital spaces.

Identity Construction in the Vlogging Space

Participants' accounts revealed that identity construction was a dynamic negotiation between authenticity and performance. Offline roles were extended into digital personas, but always reshaped by algorithmic visibility and audience expectations. Authenticity was lived as a paradox (i.e., sincerity entangled with staging) while hybrid identities reflected the blending of personal, professional, and cultural selves. Hence, vlogging became a site of continuous identity work, where creators interpreted themselves as both "real" and "performed."

Authenticity as Paradox

Experiences of authenticity appeared to differ among participants. Vlogger 7 explained, *"Who I am in real life is exactly who I am in my vlogs."* Her account may suggest that vlogging was understood as a seamless extension of everyday identity rather than a separate performance. In contrast, Vlogger 3 admitted, *"You have to show on social media that you're happy, even if sometimes you're really not."* This reflection can be interpreted as highlighting the tension between genuine self-expression and the expectations of online audiences, where emotions seemed filtered through demands for visibility. Similarly, Vlogger 9 stated, *"What I posted online is*

who and what I am. I don't fake things." Her perspective may suggest that authenticity was claimed as continuity, yet the broader set of accounts suggests that authenticity was not absolute but negotiated. These narratives suggest that authenticity was lived as a paradox, simultaneously sincere and staged, requiring participants to balance disclosure with the pressures of maintaining an online presence.

Performance for Visibility

Algorithmic demands shaped participants' understanding of the need for constant visibility. Vlogger 4 reflected, *"If I don't post for one day, my views can drop by 10,000 or 20,000."* His response may suggest that content creation was tied closely to platform rhythms, where posting became less a matter of choice and more a necessity for sustaining relevance. Emotional expression also seemed influenced by these pressures. Vlogger 3 noted, *"Even when I feel lonely, I have to appear positive."* This reflection can be interpreted as showing how positivity was adopted as part of the persona required to maintain audience connection. At the same time, Vlogger 4 observed, *"Some people think I'm flirtatious, while others think I'm amusing,"* which suggesting that identity was co-constructed through audience perceptions, shaping how vloggers adjusted their performances. These responses appear to highlight that performance was not simply about pretending but about strategically managing impressions within the attention economy. Visibility may therefore be understood as contingent on continuous negotiation among personal identity, audience expectations, and algorithmic demands.

Algorithmic Adaptation

Offline roles appeared to serve as foundations for digital identity; however, they were continuously reshaped by platform demands. Vlogger 8 reflected, *"Since I'm already a mom, it's easier for me to create content around that."* Her account may suggest that personal experiences were repurposed into content aligned with audience interests and algorithmic visibility. Vlogger 10 added, *"Technically, I'm a teacher, so the language I use in my vlogs is different from how I speak in the classroom."* This reflection can be interpreted as showing how professional identity was adapted to fit the expectations of digital performance, highlighting the fluidity of self-presentation across contexts. Institutional pressures also seemed to play a role. Vlogger 1 explained, *"I created a new Facebook Page... If the school calls us out, that's the time I slowly transfer our posts."* His account may indicate that identity construction was mediated not only by algorithms and audiences but also by workplace boundaries and risks. These reflections appear to highlight that vlogger identity was hybrid and continuously negotiated. Offline identities may have provided resources for digital personas, but these personas were constantly modified in response to algorithmic systems, audience interpretations, and institutional constraints.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how emerging Filipino vloggers in Mindanao negotiate identity, motivation, and labor within algorithmically governed platforms. Across the findings, vlogging appears not simply as a communicative practice but as a socio-technical arrangement where affect, visibility, and livelihood are co-produced through platform participation. Rather than treating motivations, identity, and challenges as separate domains, the analysis suggests that they function as an integrated system shaped by platform logics, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural expectations. Interpreting these experiences through UGT and Dramaturgical Theory highlights how gratifications are embedded in production and how identity is continuously staged and concealed in response to algorithmic governance.

Motivation as Integrated Platform Engagement

The findings extend UGT by challenging the assumption that media use is driven by discrete and stable categories of need (Katz et al., 1973). In algorithmically structured environments, gratifications appear relational and mutually reinforcing rather than separable. Emotional, social, and economic dimensions of participation operate simultaneously, suggesting that vlogging is best understood as integrated platform engagement

rather than purposive media selection. In this study, gratification is not merely an outcome of media use but becomes embedded within the production process itself. Visibility, recognition, and monetization are not external rewards but internalized as part of the content creation practice. This indicates a shift from consumption-based gratification to production-embedded gratification, where value is continuously negotiated through engagement metrics and platform feedback loops. Importantly, these motivations are socially and materially situated. Rather than reflecting individual psychological preferences alone, they are shaped by livelihood conditions and relational obligations. This supports broader critiques of UGT that call for greater attention to the socioeconomic embeddedness of digital participation, while also showing how gratifications are lived as part of identity work.

Identity as Algorithmically Mediated Performance

What has been uncovered in this study reframes Dramaturgical Theory (Goffman, 1959) by demonstrating that identity performance in digital environments is no longer solely organized around a human audience. Instead, performance is structured through a triadic system involving self, audience, and algorithm. In this configuration, impression management is not only interpersonal but infrastructural, shaped by visibility regimes. Participants revealed how frontstage personas were curated to appear happy, confident, and authentic, even when backstage realities involved grief, exhaustion, or criticism. Several admitted to concealing fatigue or negative emotions, underscoring how dramaturgy explains the hiding of backstage selves to sustain frontstage visibility. Thus, authenticity becomes paradoxical: lived as sincerity entangled with staging, continuously recalibrated in relation to platform feedback systems. This extends dramaturgical theory by shifting its focus from social impression management to platform-conditioned identity construction, where hiding, staging, and adapting personas are central to the lived experience of becoming a vlogger.

Digital Labor as Embedded and Unequal Practice

The results contribute to digital labor scholarship by illustrating how content creation operates as continuous, multi-layered labor embedded within platform economies. Vlogging involves not only creative production but also ongoing affective, technical, and relational work required to sustain visibility and engagement. However, the study advances this notion by emphasizing that digital labor is simultaneously platform-dependent and infrastructure-dependent. While platform algorithms structure visibility, material conditions such as connectivity, device access, and production resources determine the capacity to participate meaningfully in creator economies. This reinforces arguments that digital labor is stratified not only by platform governance but also by uneven access to technological infrastructure. Moreover, the emotional dimensions of labor indicate that content creator economies are sustained by affective investment continually exposed to volatility. Engagement fluctuations and public feedback are not external metrics but are internalized as indicators of self-worth and legitimacy, revealing how labor and identity become deeply intertwined in platform environments.

Contextualizing Platform Participation in Regional Ecologies

The findings underscore the importance of situating platform participation within regional and socioeconomic contexts. While dominant influencer studies often focus on urban, highly commercialized creator ecosystems (De Vera & Saludadez, 2021), this study demonstrates that, in Mindanao, vlogging is embedded in everyday negotiations over livelihood, family responsibilities, and constrained digital access. This regional positioning reframes vlogging not as aspirational entrepreneurship alone but as a form of situated platform engagement shaped by structural limitations and local meaning systems. Digital participation is, therefore, not uniformly experienced but varies significantly depending on infrastructural access, economic opportunity, and cultural context. This highlights the need for platform studies to move beyond centralized or Western-centric influencer models and toward more geographically diverse analyses of creator practices.

Limitations and Future Research

The study's participants, although sufficient for a phenomenological inquiry, were somewhat homogeneous, with the majority female educators. This composition constrains the diversity of perspectives and limits transferability; however, it also provides a coherent lens into how a specific group negotiates vlogging as a professional and personal practice. Recruitment through Facebook networks may have introduced selection bias by favoring those already active on the platform, but it simultaneously ensured access to authentic, engaged creators within the regional context. The use of multiple data collection modalities (face-to-face interviews, video conferencing, and asynchronous online form responses) created variation in data richness, with written responses lacking the spontaneity and probing opportunities of live interviews. To mitigate this, clarifications were sought from asynchronous participants, and their accounts were interpreted alongside synchronous data with sensitivity to differences in depth. Reliance on self-reported accounts raises the possibility of selective disclosure or social desirability bias; however, such reflections remain central to phenomenological inquiry, as they reveal how participants themselves construct meaning. Future research should broaden participant diversity across regions, occupations, and platforms, compare urban and rural experiences, and examine bilingual and intercultural identity work. Longitudinal designs would further capture evolving motivations, challenges, and identity negotiations over time.

CONCLUSION

For emerging Filipino creators in the Southern Philippines, vlogging is lived as a form of identity construction. It is an ongoing negotiation between authenticity and performance, shaped by algorithmic governance and local socioeconomic realities. Interpreted within the framework of UGT, vlogging becomes active meaning-making: a way to cope with grief, seek recognition, pursue livelihood, and rediscover selfhood. Viewed through Dramaturgical Theory, vlogging is revealed as performance, where creators sustain frontstage personas of confidence and happiness while concealing backstage selves marked by fatigue, criticism, and precarity. Hence, authenticity is lived as a paradox, where sincerity is entangled with staging, continuously recalibrated in relation to audience expectations and algorithmic pressures. By situating these dynamics in Mindanao, the study demonstrates that digital participation is not uniform but regionally conditioned by infrastructure, livelihood, and community ties. Vlogging here is more than entertainment or entrepreneurial pursuit; it is a situated form of digital storytelling through which individuals sustain identity, negotiate agency, and engage audiences under precarious conditions.

This research advances the theorization of vlogging as dramaturgical identity work embedded in platform economies, where gratifications are production-embedded, and authenticity remains structurally unstable. It contributes to global scholarship by showing that identity construction in digital spaces is unevenly distributed, with creators in resource-constrained contexts facing distinct challenges and opportunities. To "become a vlogger" is, therefore, to inhabit a paradoxical identity, authentic yet staged, personal yet algorithmically shaped, revealing how digital labor and selfhood are co-produced in diverse cultural and technological ecologies.

Author Contributions

R. P. Malinda: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing- Original draft preparation; Writing-Reviewing and Editing; **A. J. A. Catolpos:** Investigation, Data curation, Writing-Original draft preparation; **M. E. J. Cuadra:** Investigation, Writing-Reviewing and Editing

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Ethical Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the BukSU Research Ethics Committee (Protocol Code. 025-159-VEM-MALINDA, dated October 9, 2025). Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Competing interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

Data will be made available by the corresponding author on request.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Use

In this work, the authors used artificial intelligence tools (ChatGPT and Copilot) for language refinement and the organization of ideas. After using these tools, the authors critically reviewed and revised the content as necessary and assumed full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the published work.

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