2026 EDITION

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Seen Online, Unseen in Policy: The Creator Labor Gap

What does the history of labor tell us about the future of the creator economy?

The AIC's Academic Advisory Circle weighs in for our 4th annual International Creator Day Report

americaninfluencercouncil.com

CREATORS BRANDS

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One post.
Dozens of roles.
Skewed perception.

Before a single piece of content goes live, a career creator has already acted as their own creative director, copywriter, location scout, photographer, videographer, editor, brand strategist, copyright and trademark legal reviewer, content liability mitigator, and project manager.

Then it goes live. Suddenly, they also become their own community manager, platform strategist, and customer service department.

What looks like one post is a full creative production cycle. One that most brands would staff an entire agency team to execute. Career creators do it alone. This is not a hobby or a fleeting moment. This is a career, and it deserves to be treated like one.

More than half the world's population is on social media (Digital 2026 Global Overview Report, We Are Social and Meltwater, October 2025).

The demand for creator content is not going anywhere. In fact, it is a profession, defining digital culture and advertising for the next 20 to 30 years.

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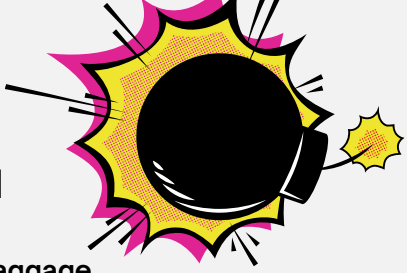
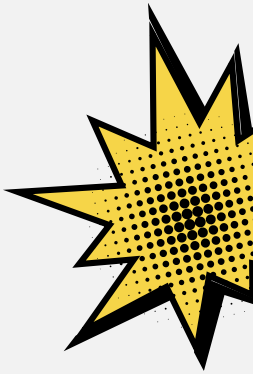
THE STIGMA IS THE POLICY PROBLEM



The word "influencer" carries baggage.



It conjures up filters, sponsorships, and selfies — not spreadsheets, contracts, and production schedules. That cultural stigma is not just a perception problem. It is a policy problem. Moving from stigma to trade standardization is essential to ensuring this career remains viable for future generations.

When the public dismisses creators as attention-seekers and policymakers fail to recognize them as workers, the result is the same. A workforce of millions operating without the protections, classifications, and resources they have earned.

Creators are founders. They are creatorpreneurs. They are independent small business media companies. They build audiences, manage revenue streams, and drive billions in economic activity without the institutional support afforded to every other recognized business owner.

The stigma is keeping policy stuck. The data says it’s time to move.

POLICY PROGRESS: KID INFLUENCERS AND CHILD LABOR LAWS

Despite the lack of labor protections afforded to career creators and influencers, several U.S. states have introduced legislation earmarked for children and family influencers.

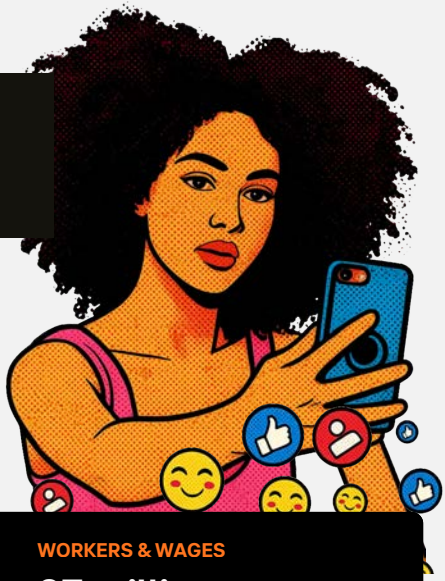
Child labor laws date back to the early 20th century. More than eighty-five years ago, the California Child Actor's Bill, known as the Coogan Law, became the first U.S. legislation recognizing that a minor's earnings from performance are their own (SAG-AFTRA).

In recent years, California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Utah have introduced legislation to protect child influencers (AIC, State Laws Protecting Kid Influencers, 2025). The realization that content creation is a form of labor deserving of legal safeguards is meaningful progress.

Still, many issues remain for the wider community of professional content creators. What's more, the focus on fame and financial exploitation means that many labor-related issues persist.

Policy recognized the child.
It has yet to recognize the profession
— or the workforce behind it.

ABOUT THE REPORT



The creator economy is no longer an emerging industry — it is an established workforce.

This report marks a first for the AIC. Rather than asking brand marketers or platform executives to forecast creator economy labor trends, the American Influencer Council (AIC) turned to leading university scholars via our newly launched **Academic Advisory Circle**.

The AIC Academic Advisory Circle brings together some of the most rigorous academic minds working at the intersection of digital media, marketing, labor, and culture.

Our inaugural Circle Members are not observers of the creator economy — they are the scholars shaping how we understand it. Their research spans influencer marketing and brand strategy, platform labor and worker classification, digital communication technologies, integrated marketing communications, and the evolving ethics of content and commerce.

Collectively, they represent eight leading U.S. universities and bring both the depth of peer-reviewed scholarship and the currency of active research to every question the creator economy raises.

WORKERS & WAGES

27 million
the approximate number of paid content creators in the United States.

Source: Keller Advisory Group, 2023

IN ORDER TO FUTURE-PROOF THE CREATOR PROFESSION, WE MUST CLOSE THIS GAP

FULL-TIME CREATORPRENEUR

1.5 million
the number of full-time digital creators in America.

Source: Deighton and Kornfeld's Measuring the Digital Economy, IAB, 2025

ABOUT THE REPORT

The AIC Academic Advisory Circle was asked to apply the tools of rigorous research to a question the industry and policymakers have been discussing for years without answering clearly:

What does the history of labor, gig work, and worker organizing tell us about where the creator economy is headed — and what should career creators understand about the protections, risks, and advocacy opportunities that may define the next five years?

The scholars you'll hear from in the following pages bring historical context, peer-reviewed methodology, and disciplined inquiry to questions that practitioners are often too close to answer objectively.

Their perspectives are not predictions. They are findings.

THE POLICY GAP

90.7%
of women-owned U.S. businesses are solo operations with no employees and no SBA classification.

Women hold 70% of the market share within the creator economy. The data exists. The policy protections do not.

Source: SBA Office of Advocacy, 2025; Collabstr, 2025

CAREER CREATORS ARE RUNNING SMALL BUSINESSES INSIDE AN ECONOMY THAT DOESN'T YET HAVE A CLASSIFICATION FOR THEM

THE CREATOR LABOR GAP

The creator economy has one of the largest participation-to-sustainability gaps of any U.S. labor market. **Only 3.9% of all U.S.-based creators work full-time** — the rest remain hobbyists, passion creators, or those still trying to cross into full-time work.

TOTAL U.S. CREATORS

39M

U.S.-based individuals creating & sharing original content with 1,000+ followers on at least one platform

Source: Florida, R. & Creative Class Group, The Creator Revolution: Results from a Global Survey., p. 3 & p. 6, December 2024

The Creator Labor Gap

FULL-TIME CREATORS

1.5M

Full-time equivalent creator jobs in the U.S. — growing 7.5x since 2020

Source: Deighton and Kornfeld's Measuring the Digital Economy, IAB, 2025

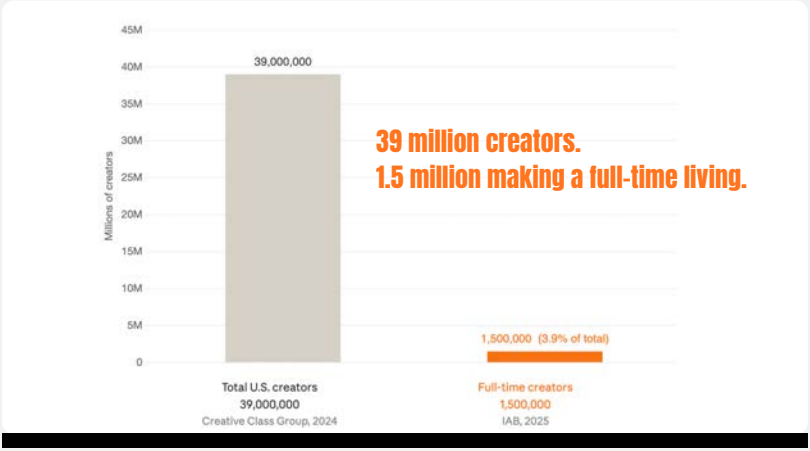
WORKING FULL-TIME

3.9%

The share of all U.S. creators who work as full-time creators — the gap this report addresses

The 3.9% figure was calculated by the AIC by dividing 1.5 million full-time creators by 39 million total U.S. creators, which totals 3.85% rounded up to 3.9%

Creators are the largest and fastest-growing job segment in the digital economy, now accounting for more than 1 in 10 full-time, internet-dependent jobs. Yet the vast majority lack the traditional small business infrastructure needed to sustain it.



Sources: Florida, R. and Creative Class Group, The Creator Revolution: Results from a Global Survey, December 2024 — defines creators as individuals creating and sharing original content via social media with 1,000+ followers on at least one platform. | Deighton, J. & Kornfeld, L., Measuring the Digital Economy, IAB, April 2025 — measures full-time equivalent (FTE) creator jobs in the U.S. digital economy. | 3.9% calculated by AIC (1.5M ÷ 39M). Note: The two studies use different definitions and data collection periods; figures are not directly comparable but together illustrate the participation-to-sustainability gap.

FOREWORD

Qianna Smith Bruneteau
AIC Founder, Executive Director

As millions of career creators build full-time businesses on platforms they don't own, questions of worker classification, wage equity, and collective power are no longer hypothetical. For all the industry conversation about brand deals, follower counts, and monetization strategies, **scholars have increasingly argued that social media content creators are a workforce that qualifies to be a legally recognized and protected class of U.S. labor**. The harder question is no longer academic. It is political. The challenge now is convincing policymakers and regulators with the power to act.

Communication scholars have examined labor vulnerability and occupational burnout (Duffy et al., Social Media + Society, 2021).

Labor economists have mapped gig worker income and the stark earnings inequality driving the rise of the creator middle class. Law reviews have debated independent contractor classification.

But these conversations rarely converge on the creator as both a worker and a small business owner — a dual identity deserving of labor recognition.

That is why, at the AIC, advocating for the small business rights of influencers is not just timely. It is critical to the sustained growth of this established labor segment.

Until the creator economy is recognized as a measurable segment of U.S. GDP, career creators will remain locked out of the Small Business Administration (SBA) resources and policy protections.

Career creators driving a projected $480 billion market have every right to expect and demand those protections (Sheridan et al., Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, 2023).

FOREWORD

According to the We Are Social and Meltwater Digital 2026 Global Overview Report, 5.66 billion social media user identities now exist across a global population of 8.25 billion — nearly 69% of the world. When participation is this universal, the phrase "everyone is a creator" is no longer hyperbole. But scale alone does not define a workforce.

What distinguishes career creators from the billions of hobbyists and passion posters who share the same platforms is economic intent, professional infrastructure, and the decision to build a business — not just an audience. That distinction is precisely what this report is designed to make legible.

For the AIC's 4th annual International Creator Day Trend Report, we did something different. Instead of asking brand marketers to share their predictions, we asked scholars.

The **AIC Academic Advisory Circle**, our newly established network of credentialed researchers, brings the kind of evidence-informed, historically grounded perspective that the industry has long needed.

The creator economy deserves more than industry opinion. It deserves research-driven scholarship. This report is proof of that.

CREATORS ON PROFESSIONAL VALIDATION

To better understand the stakes behind the creator labor gap, the AIC asked three career creators to reflect on the importance of professional validation for themselves and their community. Their perspectives reveal how recognition operates as a gatekeeper in the creator economy.

"My ability to deliver high-performing, engaging campaigns is rooted in my background as a marketing strategist in tech and manufacturing. I'm a Latina working-class creator. **The labor I bring to this work is professional, strategic, and proven** — and overlooking my micro audience means overlooking a community with real buying power and social impact."

VANESSA BAHENA
@FirstGenHouse
firstgenhouse.com

"**When policies overlook us, it leaves us exposed.**

No benefits, no security, just the grind. That's why legitimacy matters: it's the difference between being recognized as a worker and not being left outside the system."

JENNA DILLULIO
@JennaDillulio
jennadillulio.com

CREATORS ON PROFESSIONAL VALIDATION

"I've been featured in dozens of major media outlets, built a recognized brand, and cultivated a community that trusts me. But without consistent professional recognition across platforms, that trust becomes a liability. Scammers exploit the gap between my visibility and my verified standing, and my audience pays the price. **Legitimacy isn't just about status. It's the infrastructure that protects the business I've built and the people I serve.**"

GIOVANNA GONZÁLEZ
@GigiTheFirstGenMentor
thefirstgenmentor.com

"Creators are building real businesses but are still treated like hobbyists. I have negotiated contracts, driven revenue, and built long-term brand partnerships, yet access to financial tools and institutional support still lag behind.

Without legitimacy, creators are underpaid and expected to absorb the very real costs of running a small business."

FRANCESCA MURRAY
@OneGirlOneWorld
onegirl-oneworld.com

CREATORS ON PROFESSIONAL VALIDATION

A personal brand is one of the most legitimate assets anyone can build right now.

As AI automates many traditional jobs, creators with engaged online audiences will be the ones with irreplaceable value, trust, and distribution.

Having built an 8-figure business on social media, I've seen firsthand how real this work is.

But **without labor protections and professional recognition, creators can't fully capitalize on what they've built — and that needs to change**. This is one of the most enduring professions of our time.

CHRISTINA GALBATO

@ChristinaGalbato
christinagalbato.com


AIC Academic
Advisory Circle

Scholar Contributions

We asked our eight Academic Advisory Circle Members to answer the following question:

WHAT does the history of labor, gig work, or worker organizing tell us about where the creator economy is headed — and what should career creators understand about the protections, risks, and advocacy opportunities that may define the next five years

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Jenna Drenten, Ph.D.
Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Programs and Faculty Affairs; Professor of Marketing, Quinlan School of Business
Loyola University Chicago

Creators aren't just making content — they produce data, attention, and cultural value.

As I argue in my research, influencers are no longer just promotional tools; they are cultural intermediaries and brands in their own right, navigating the nuances of monetization, celebrity fandom, and ever-changing platform algorithms (Drenten, NIM Marketing Intelligence Review, 2025).

Yet too often, the darker, exploitative side of this work is overlooked. The seeming glamour of influencer lifestyles overshadows the relentless pursuit of profitability and online attention.

Building an audience on rented land means the landlord sets the terms. Follower counts feel like leverage until the algorithm changes. This is the structural reality of the attention economy: a system where creators' visibility is not the same as their power. The platforms that distribute that visibility capture most of its economic value.

VISIBILITY IS NOT THE SAME AS POWER

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

The history of labor tells us this pattern is familiar. **In the age of "panopticontent," where everything becomes content and everyone is a potential subject, the lines between worker, product, and audience have collapsed** (Drenten, NIM Marketing Intelligence Review, 2025).

Influencers are simultaneously the producers of content, the content itself, and the distribution channel. This triple burden has no historical equivalent in labor law, which is precisely why existing protections fail to reach them. Being seen online but unseen in policy is exactly why creators remain unprotected under existing labor frameworks.

– Jenna Drenten, Ph.D.

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Regina Luttrell, Ph.D.
Senior Associate Dean,
Associate Professor, Public Relations,
S. I. Newhouse School of Public
Communications, Syracuse University

History shows that fast-growing labor markets consistently outpace worker protections before organizing, standards, and policy catch up. The creator economy is no exception. The next five years will likely bring greater advocacy around pay transparency, contract fairness, platform accountability, IP rights, and benefits. There will be growing pressure to treat creator work as real labor, not simply personal brand-building.

As I assert in *Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect* (Luttrell, Bloomsbury, 5th Ed.), the most effective communicators are those who combine creativity with accountability and innovation with integrity. That principle applies to the profession as a whole. Career creators are running small businesses. They are producing data, attention, and cultural value, and they deserve the professional standards and institutional recognition that every other legitimate labor market has fought for and won. The window to shape that future is now. The question is whether the industry will build that future intentionally or wait until policy forces the issue.

THE LABOR GAP WON'T CLOSE ITSELF

LEGITIMATE

For more than two decades, digital creators have been building legitimate, independent media brands: producing original content, cultivating audiences, negotiating contracts, managing revenue streams, and driving billions of dollars in economic activity.

This is not a side hustle. It is a profession.

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Wangari Njathi, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Integrated Marketing Communication,
Seaver College, Pepperdine University

The history of gig economies tells us that rapid growth is almost always followed by regulatory scrutiny and partial labor formalization.

The creator economy is following the same path.

Platform systems were built to scale attention, not to protect the people producing it. That asymmetry is the defining labor challenge of the next five years.

In my research on Instagram influencers in Nairobi, documented in *Global South Creator Cultures* (Njathi, Routledge, 2024), I found that platform capitalism extracts value globally but distributes protection unevenly.

Career creators everywhere should expect tighter contracts, greater transparency requirements, and stronger advocacy for fair compensation and platform accountability. The question is not whether formalization is coming. It is whether the frameworks being built will serve all creators — or only the most visible ones.

THE LABOR GAP HAS NO BORDERS

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Colten Meisner, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Department of Communication,
North Carolina State University

My research at North Carolina State University has documented creators increasingly carving out space in the "creator middle class" — prioritizing sustainable income with smaller, more loyal audiences over broad viral reach.

Many have migrated to more private platforms like WhatsApp, Discord, or subscription and community platforms like Substack and Patreon, where they maintain deeper relationships with recurring, paying supporters.

In a recent study of career creators across nine countries, I found that the majority who made this shift experienced lower work insecurity, reduced burnout, and more sustainable labor.

The next five years will likely see this model expand, as both the industry and its creators trade follower counts for community, equity, and partnership.

THE MIDDLE CLASS CREATOR RISES

RECOGNITION

Creators are an in-demand labor force that has earned, and deserves formal recognition by government, industry, and society as a valued and measurable segment of the U.S. digital economy.

In 2025, YouTube turned 20. The creator economy is not emerging. It has matured.

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Krysten Stein, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Department of English & Communication,
University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College

The history of gig work shows that flexibility often comes with income ups and downs, and eventually, collective organizing.

Research on platform labor confirms that the economics of full-time creator work remain deeply precarious.

More than half of all creators earn under $15,000 a year, well below a living wage in most U.S. cities (Influencer Marketing Hub & NeoReach, Creator Earnings Report, 2025).

A 2026 survey of 539 creators found that 77% price their work based on time and effort required, framing creator partnerships as skilled production labor. Yet brands continue to anchor compensation to follower count, a persistent structural mismatch that leaves many creators undervalued (NeoReach, Creator Impact Report, 2026).

As creators increasingly recognize themselves as workers, history points toward more advocacy around transparency, fair pay, and protections. Creators should understand both the risks of platform dependence and the growing momentum behind collective action and labor rights.

CREATORS CLAIM COLLECTIVE STRENGTH

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Jessica Maddox, Ph.D.
Associate Professor,
Entertainment and Media Studies,
University of Georgia – Grady College

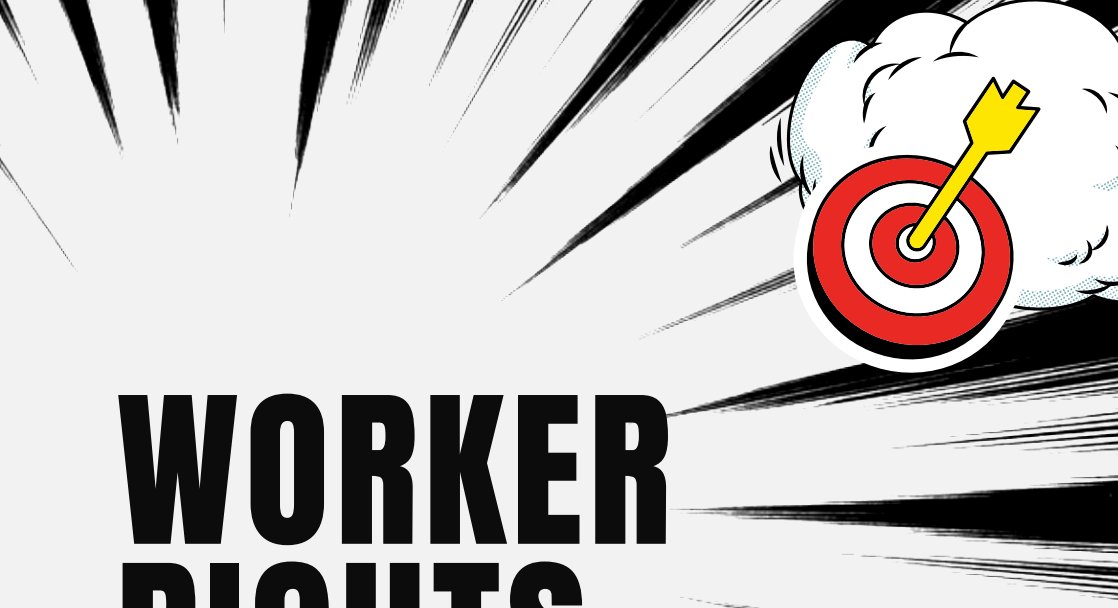
Authenticity online has never been natural — it's always been performed.

Research in computer-mediated communication shows that "being real" is shaped by platform design, audience expectations, and repeatable self-presentation strategies (Maddox, Convergence, 2023).

What's changed is the format. On BeReal, authenticity has shifted from polished relatability to time-bound, in-the-moment posting.

Studies show that even "unfiltered" content is structured by platform design, where spontaneity is engineered and user behavior is guided toward a specific version of authenticity (Taylor, Social Media + Society, 2023).

Creators are pushing back against the emotional labor of manufactured relatability. Audiences are realizing they're getting curated performances instead of genuine connection. We're entering a post-authenticity era where "realness" means unfiltered, unbranded moments that can't be scripted. That kind of vulnerability is the hardest labor of all and the least protected.



WORKER RIGHTS

Labor legitimacy is not a symbolic distinction. It carries real consequences: validation of professional status, access to worker protections, eligibility for small business resources, and the rights and benefits afforded to every recognized segment of the American workforce.

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Jabari Miles Evans, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Race and Media,
University of South Carolina

For more than a decade, my research on visibility labor has documented what happens when young Black creators build careers in systems that were never designed to protect them. The same dynamics are now present across the creator economy at large.

When industries mature, governance tends to follow. Whoever controls the governance captures the value.

In *The Audacity of Clout (Chasing)* (Evans & Baym, International Journal of Communication, 2022), I documented that clout gave Black youth pathways to mobility — but it did so at a price. The same logic applies here: the creator economy offers unprecedented opportunity, but the cost structure is hidden and the risks fall disproportionately on those least positioned to absorb them. Monetization isn't everything. Ownership is. And organizing for it has to start now.

CLOUT ISN'T POWER. OWNERSHIP IS.

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Jess Rauchberg, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Department of Communication Media and the Arts at Seton Hall University

Rage-bait and exploitation are not accidents of the algorithm — they are calculated labor strategies, deliberately incentivized by platforms that reward emotional provocation over content quality.

Livestreamers face harassment from their own subscriber communities. Lifestyle creators are economically pressured to overconsume. Audiences spend hours anonymously dissecting creators on Reddit. The creator outrage economy is not new.

Exploitative entertainment industries have always incentivized conflict for profit: reality television, tabloid media, and performance spectacle all follow the same pattern.

Vulnerable workers pay the personal cost. This is especially true for marginalized creators, who are less likely to be compensated equitably and more likely to experience harassment.

As platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram have rolled back trust and safety protections, exploitation and harassment have surged 50 percent (Hickey et al., 2025).

BUILT TO PROVOKE. PAID TO PERFORM

Scholar Contribution
AIC Academic Advisory Circle

Creators should understand that the psychological and economic costs of outrage labor come at their expense.

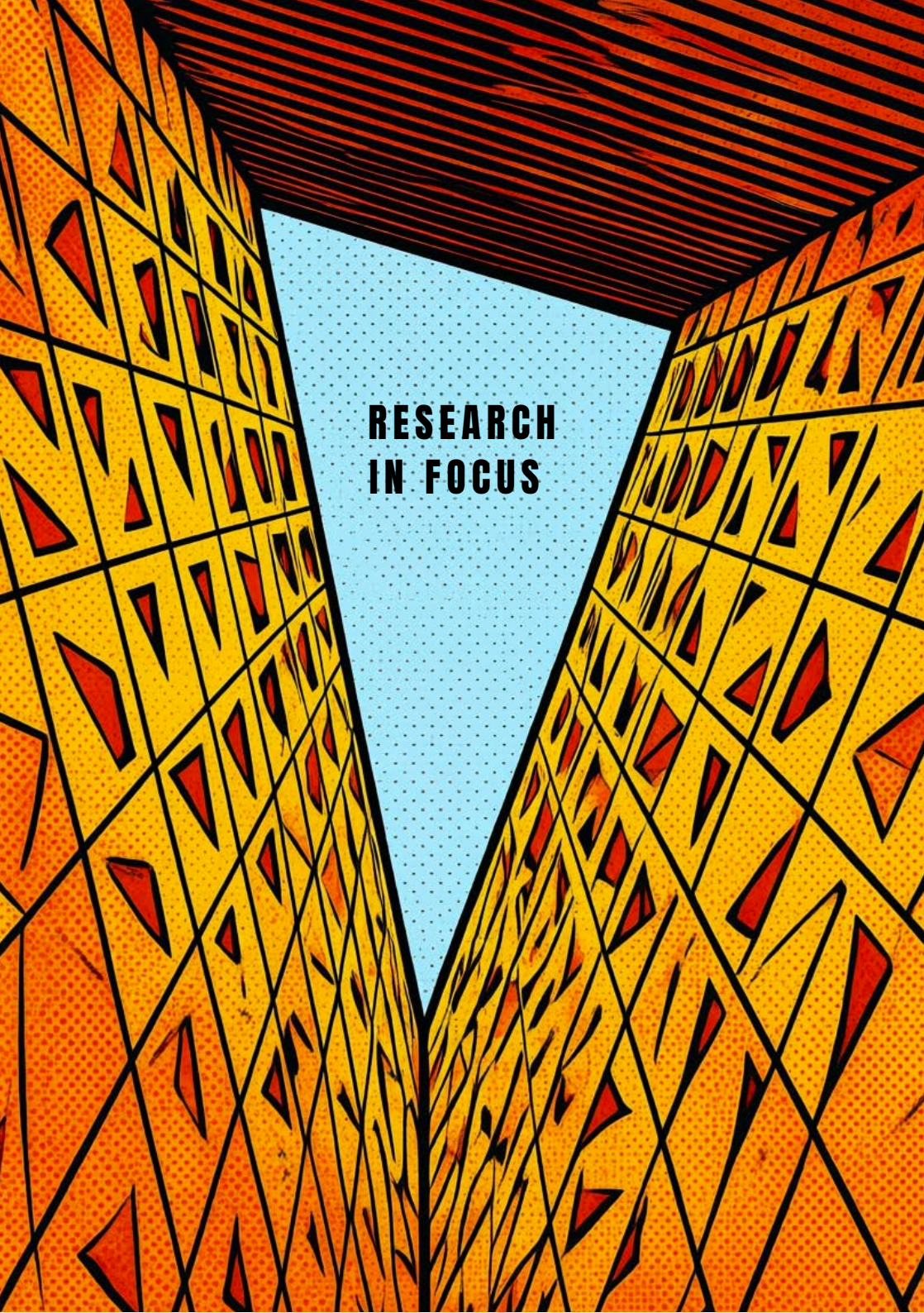
These working conditions put the most vulnerable creators at greatest risk professionally, financially, and personally.

– Jess Rauchberg, Ph.D.

PROTECTIONS

The question is no longer whether creators are laborers. The scholarship in these pages confirms they are.

The question now is whether the institutions with the power to act will catch up to what the data already shows.


RESEARCH
IN FOCUS

Research In Focus

FIVE KEY ISSUES FOR CREATOR LABOR POLICY

Brooke Erin Duffy

AIC Board Advisor

Associate Professor, Department of Communication
Cornell University

When I began researching first-gen bloggers and vloggers in the early 2010s, digital-native cultural production was little understood as a form of labor (Duffy, (Not) Getting Paid To Do What You Love, Yale University Press, 2017). Neither policymakers nor the wider public recognized the distinctiveness of professional content creation.

Much has changed over the last decade, especially with the post-pandemic growth of the creator economy. Social media creators are now at the center of commercial, cultural, and civic life.

Yet issues of labor policy and regulation have failed to keep pace.

The fraught nature of creator labor owes much to the classification of U.S. creators as independent contractors. The majority are what my collaborators and I call "platform-dependent laborers" (Poell, Nieborg & Duffy, Platforms and Cultural Production, Polity Press, 2022) — they depend on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and more for visibility, access to audiences, and monetization opportunities. Yet, they are not considered legal employees of these Big Tech platforms.

Within and well beyond the creator economy, "independence" is touted as a job perk. But for workers lacking stable income and workplace provisions, labor independence translates into structural vulnerability.

Research In Focus

FIVE KEY ISSUES FOR CREATOR LABOR POLICY

Based on more than 100 in-depth interviews conducted for my forthcoming book, *The Visibility Bind: Being Seen, Getting Paid, and Paying the Price of Social Media Success* (The University of Chicago Press), I have identified five key labor policy issues.

1 PLATFORM TRANSPARENCY: Platforms' opaque policies and "blackboxed" algorithms amplify conditions of uncertainty. Marginalized creators or those who produce content about social justice issues are especially susceptible to content suppression, demonetization, and what I term "algorithmic precarity" (Duffy, Information, Communication & Society, 2020).

"INDEPENDENCE" IS TOUTED AS A JOB PERK. BUT FOR WORKERS LACKING STABLE INCOME AND WORKPLACE PROVISIONS, LABOR INDEPENDENCE TRANSLATES INTO STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITY.

2 **PAY GAPS AND INEQUALITY**: While star creators command jaw-dropping earnings from brand sponsorships and platform payouts, the majority of creators earn modest sums. Roughly half reportedly earn less than $10,000 annually (Influencer Marketing Factory, Creator Economy Report, 2026).

Gender- and race-based pay gaps persist, too. A 2025 industry survey revealed that male influencers earn 40% more from brand sponsors (Collabstr, Influencer Marketing Report, 2025). Creators of color are paid significantly less than their white counterparts (SevenSix Agency, Influencer Pricing Report, 2024).

Research In Focus
FIVE KEY ISSUES FOR CREATOR LABOR POLICY

3 **INCENTIVIZED HARM**: Online communities may be vibrant, but they can also be vicious. My interviewees report experiences of hate, harassment, and doxing — along with networked forms of antagonism (e.g., hate raids or malicious mass reporting). Worse, creators are compelled to tolerate public harassment, lest they deflate their metrics with blocks or deletions. This dynamic underpins so-called "rage-baiting" practices, where creators deliberately court controversy in an effort to curry favor with platforms' algorithms.

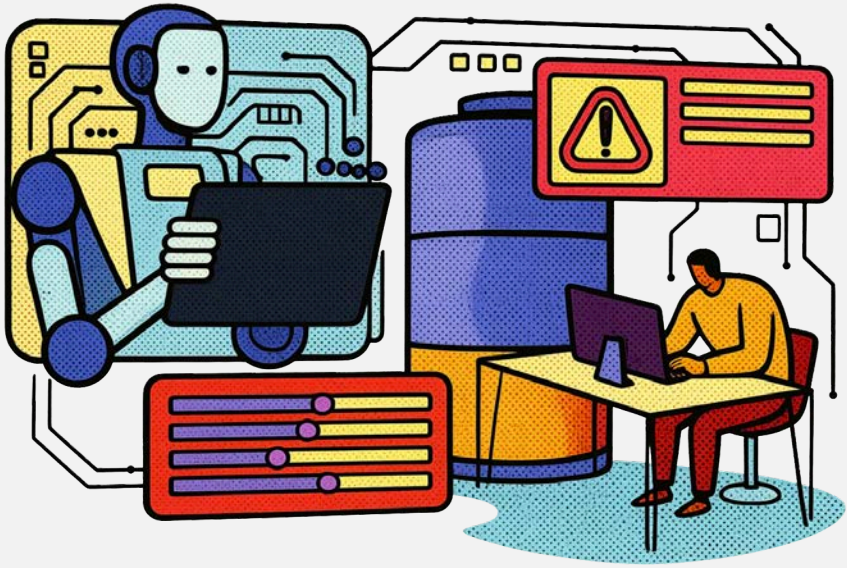
FOR MANY CREATORS, THE WORK THAT DEFINES THEIR IDENTITY IS ALSO THE WORK THAT DEPLETES IT.

4 **BURNOUT**: The cross-platform demands of creator labor produce conditions for chronic fatigue, overwork, and burnout. Creators feel anxious about posting breaks: audiences could lose interest or algorithms could quietly reduce their reach. For many creators, the work that defines their identity is also the work that depletes it — a tension that sits at the heart of the sustainability crisis facing the profession. What's more, creators are reluctant to speak out about these perils given the pervasive framing of content creation as a "lucky job" (AIC, Speaking Up About Creator Burnout, 2025).

Research In Focus

FIVE KEY ISSUES FOR CREATOR LABOR POLICY

5 **AI HARMS**: While platforms are pushing creators toward AI-assisted production and even avatar "clones," creators worry about the hidden costs. Large content archives, combined with close parasocial relationships with audiences, make them especially vulnerable to deepfake abuse and image theft.



The rapid growth of generative AI makes issues of creator consent, compensation, and intellectual property all the more urgent. Creator labor is being appropriated not only by bad-faith actors but also, allegedly, by platforms themselves. Recent litigation highlights this directly. YouTubers have sued Amazon, claiming an AI tool was trained on scraped videos without creator consent or compensation (CNET, 2025).

Research In Focus
FIVE KEY ISSUES FOR CREATOR LABOR POLICY

The challenges of platform-dependent work are exacerbated by a lack of formal workplace structures and regulatory provisions. Content creators are, for instance, excluded from the U.S. census (Harwell & Lorenz, Washington Post, 2023). Meanwhile, the first major lawsuit to tackle copyright over influencer aesthetics was eventually dismissed (Sato, The Verge, 2024).

The globally dispersed nature of the creator class means laborers lack a proverbial “shop floor” on which to organize. Still, significant forms of solidarity-building and labor activism are emerging from within creator communities. From calling out YouTube’s Adpocalypse to movements like #ADayOffTwitch and the Black TikToker Strike, creators have demonstrated a capacity for the types of consciousness-raising and mutual aid that shaped earlier labor movements.

Creators are also working with policymakers to advance their collective rights — recent examples include the Creator Bill of Rights and the Congressional Creators Caucus. Advocacy work is also taking place through associations like the **American Influencer Council (AIC)** — the first U.S. trade association established to advance the labor protections and small business rights of career creators.

ABOUT

American Influencer Council

The American Influencer Council (AIC) is the first 501(c)(6) not-for-profit membership trade association in the U.S., led by and for career creators. Publicly launched on June 30, 2020, on the 10th anniversary of Global Social Media Day, the AIC champions entrepreneurship and lifelong learning among social media content professionals working in the creator economy. Through career-building resources, original research, workforce development, and business development events, the AIC supports career creators at every stage of the small business cycle.

americaninfluencercouncil.com

Academic Advisory Circle

The AIC Academic Advisory Circle is a select network of scholars whose research informs creator economy policy, business practice, and industry standards. The Advisory Circle establishes a publicly accessible archive of peer-informed academic insights on the creator economy, in direct support of the AIC's mission to democratize access to credible data and rigorous research.

For more information email:
aiceducation@americaninfluencercouncil.com

Meet the Advisory Circle Members:
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