

Chasing Views: A YouTube Reality Check

I dug into the numbers behind the world's top YouTube channels, and most of what I thought I knew turned out to be wrong.

Tools: MySQL Workbench (to query the data) • Power BI (to see it) • Python / Pandas (to clean it)

Dataset: Top-ranked YouTube channels from around the world, 950+ of them

Written by Pavan Kalyan

Before I looked at any numbers, I had a few guesses in my head. Big channels make big money. Posting more videos means growing faster. Entertainment channels run the show. I was wrong about almost all of it. Here's what the data actually told me, one question at a time.

1. Which countries have the most big channels?

I started with an easy question. Where do most of the world's top channels come from? I counted how many top channels each country had, and the answer was almost lopsided. The United States and India were miles ahead of everyone else. Brazil, the UK, and Mexico showed up next, but nowhere close to the top two. Just a few countries hold most of the world's biggest channels — if you speak English, Portuguese, or Spanish, you're already in one of the biggest audiences online.

2. Do more subscribers mean more money?

This is where things got interesting. I assumed a channel with more subscribers always earns more. So I compared subscriber counts with how much money each channel makes. Turns out, some channels with just 50 million subscribers were out-earning channels with 150 to 300 million. That shouldn't happen if subscribers were all that mattered. After a point, having more subscribers stops being the main thing that decides your income — something else is doing the heavy lifting.

3. So what decides how much a channel earns?

I went looking for that 'something else' and found it: the type of content. I compared average earnings across categories, and Shows, Autos & Vehicles, and Sports channels earned the most by far. Meanwhile, Travel & Events, Howto & Style, and Gaming channels earned much less, even with similar-sized audiences. Two channels can have the same number of fans and still earn very differently, just because of what kind of videos they make — category matters more than audience size.

4. Do older channels have bigger audiences?

Next I checked whether channel age matters. Channels started around 2008-2009 had the biggest average audiences, probably because they've simply had more years to grow. There was a small second wave around 2015, but the newest channels are still catching up. Being around longer helps you build a bigger audience, but it's getting harder for new channels to catch up to the old ones.

5. Which country makes the most money per subscriber?

I flipped question one around. Instead of asking which country has the most channels, I asked which country earns the most per subscriber. A totally different set of names showed up: Latvia, Italy, and Turkey were the leaders here, not the US or India. Having the most channels and making the most money per fan turned out to be two completely different games — small countries can win at one even if they lose at the other.

6. Does a country's job market affect its YouTube success?

I wondered if unemployment had anything to do with how many top creators a country produces. I compared each country's unemployment rate against its channel count. There was no real pattern. Countries with very different job markets both had plenty of top channels. A country's economy doesn't seem to decide who becomes a top creator — this looks more like an internet and culture story than a jobs story.

7. Does more education mean bigger channels?

I also checked if education levels played a role. I compared how many people go to college in each country against the average subscriber count of channels from there. There was a mild upward trend, more educated countries had slightly bigger average audiences, but it wasn't a strong or clean pattern. Education might help a little, but it's nowhere close to being the main reason a channel gets big.

8. Which type of channel earns the most predictable income?

Some creators want steady income, others don't mind big swings. I checked how much earnings bounce around within each channel type. Tech and Nonprofit channels were the steadiest earners. People, Music, and Games channels swung wildly, usually because a few viral hits pull the average way up. If you want steady income as a creator, some categories are simply safer bets than others.

9. Does posting more videos help you grow faster?

I expected channels that upload a lot to grow faster. They don't. Most channels post a small number of videos and grow slowly. Some channels barely post and suddenly blow up. Some channels with over 200,000 uploads barely grow at all. Posting nonstop isn't a shortcut to growth — one video going viral beats a thousand average ones.

10. When did YouTube see its biggest boom of new top channels?

I counted how many top channels were started in each year. There was a steady climb from 2005 to 2009, a big peak around 2014-2015, and a slow decline ever since. YouTube's easiest growth years are behind it — becoming a top channel today is a much harder climb than it was ten years ago.

11. Does Entertainment really rule YouTube?

Last question, and the one that surprised me most. Everyone assumes Entertainment channels dominate YouTube. I split all channels into 'Entertainment' and 'Everything else' and counted them. Entertainment turned out to be a small slice of the pie, not the majority. The idea that Entertainment runs YouTube is mostly a myth — the real top tier is spread across many different kinds of content.

Everything I walked away with

- Having more subscribers doesn't guarantee more money. What you make content about matters more than how many people watch it.
 - A few big countries have the most channels, but smaller countries like Latvia, Italy, and Turkey earn more per fan.
 - Older channels tend to have bigger audiences, but new channels are finding it harder to catch up.
 - A country's job market has almost no link to its YouTube success. Education has a small, weak link at best.
 - Posting more videos doesn't make you grow faster. Going viral matters far more than staying busy.
 - Entertainment is not the king of YouTube it's made out to be. Most top channels come from everywhere else.
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