

# Competitive and Cooperative Game: Content Creators' Strategies on Short-Form Video Platforms and Business Implications

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**Abstract.** Short-form video platforms host a complex ecosystem where content creators engage in “coopetition”—a strategic blend of simultaneous competition and collaboration. The present research explores how such interdependencies influence strategic decisions for creators, platforms, and brands. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study reveals a central paradox: coopetition drives content innovation, audience expansion, and user engagement, yet simultaneously introduces profound challenges such as intellectual property vulnerabilities, market saturation effects, and intensified investment risks, often manifesting as a ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ that compels participants into a cycle of sustained investment despite diminishing returns. To address these challenges, the study proposes a strategic framework comprising robust intellectual property protection mechanisms, equitable algorithmic distribution systems, structured brand partnership models, and comprehensive risk assessment protocols. By integrating theoretical insights with practical solutions, this research contributes significantly to both academic discourse and practical strategy formulation for navigating the emerging digital content creation economy. The study’s main theoretical contribution lies in synthesizing a novel framework that captures the dualistic nature of coopetition in digital creative markets.

**Keywords:** Coopetition Strategy; Short-Form Video Platforms; Influencer Marketing; Platform Algorithms; Risk Management.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Setting of the Research

Industry data indicates that by 2023, short-form video platforms had amassed over 3.5 billion active users globally, with a projected market value exceeding \$250 billion by 2025 [1]. Such rapid expansion has given birth to an unprecedented social and cultural environment where content creators — most often referred to as “influencers” or “digital creators” -must creatively manage complex relations combining competition with cooperation. This ecosystem challenges conventional market paradigms and redefines traditional notions of competition and collaboration. This hybrid environment creates a strategic paradox because creators need to fight for scarce resources: audience attention, advertising revenue, and platform presence and visibility. Marketing help from all potential partners is also needed in order to expand the total market pie. This dynamic plays an instrumental role in maintaining individual creator innovation and quality without raising customer weariness to the maximum [2]. At the same time, cooperative programs-including cross-platform promotion, joint live broadcasts, and joint brainchild series production-provide a vital path to open up new audience segment markets and cultivate sustainable wealth-building communities. For brands, this ecosystem presents a dual opportunity: to leverage creator partnerships for targeted marketing and to erect barriers to entry for competitors. Strategically partnering with multiple creators engaged in cooperative relationships enables campaigns to reach higher numbers of attentive eyeballs and, with even more impact, creatively mitigates investment risk through portfolio diversification [3]. The creator dynamics described above greatly augment user retention and activity metrics for platform operators, making for a continuous stream of engaging content and fostering vibrant online communities. The ongoing competition and cooperation between platforms drives constant innovation. This pushes

service providers to develop more advanced features, which in turn support more complex interactions between content creators. Beyond business impacts, these changes also deeply affect social and cultural development. When creators make content about social problems, they help the public discuss and understand these issues better. With competitive content in full-speed circulation via the Internet and traditional media alike, this kind of discussion gains strength and becomes hard not to listen to. Fresh cooperative efforts among creators with very different backgrounds can go to tear down territorial walls beyond borders, thereby promoting the acceptance of hybrids in human society [4].

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework**

Existing research has explored different aspects of competitive and cooperative games within digital content creation ecosystems. Smith and his colleagues pioneered mathematical modeling of cooperation among influencers, creating predictive frameworks for how different cooperative strategies work out to pay off [5]. Chen et al. said economic incentives, audiences, and skill development provide creators with primary motivation for competition and cooperation at the same time [6]. Williams provided a theoretical framework for understanding how platform algorithms respond to cooperative content, showing that algorithmic systems preferentially promote material featuring lots of established people again and again [7]. Thompson and Garcia showed how competitive-cooperative dynamics affect the effectiveness of advertising campaigns: those using creator collaborations had engagement rates 37% higher than those relying on only one creator [8]. Zhang and Liu contributed psychological insights into audience responses, concluding that collaborative content is seen as freer in shape and more engaging than single-author materials [9]. Brown's study on platform governance also showed how platforms use design features, like special apps and policies, to create a mix of competition and cooperation among users [10]. Together, these studies give us a full picture of competition from different angles: economic, technical, psychological, and related to rules and governance.

## **1.3. Research Objectives**

Although this field has considerably advanced our understanding of modeling, motivational drivers, and the effects of competition on digital content creators, significant research gaps remain. A great deal of present literature falls chiefly on the plus side and neglects intrinsic hindrances and problems. However, experienced creators have confirmed that for those just starting in increasingly crowded markets, costs and risks are difficult disadvantages to overcome. In addition, existing research mostly focuses on single-platform competitive-cooperative relationships rather than cross-platform ones created as creators diversify their presence across multiple services. While numerous studies examine general influencer marketing strategies, few develop actual frameworks addressing the unique challenges posed by the competitive-cooperative paradigm [11]. This article seeks to address these gaps in two ways: by presenting a comprehensive analysis of all positive and adverse effects, by examining cross-platform dynamics, and finally by suggesting specific strategic recommendations for stakeholders navigating this complex ecosystem.

## **1.4. Methodological Approach**

This study will employ a mixed-mode research design to examine competition dynamics among content creators on short video platforms. The research employs a comparative case analysis to examine current competition patterns, evaluating both their beneficial and adverse outcomes from the perspectives of creators, platforms, brands, and audiences. The study suggests specific strategic recommendations on how to bypass the identified challenges. This method integrates data analysis (such as platform analytics, industry reports, and academic literature) with the site's extensive case study of popular creator collaborations and competitions. By definition, this comprehensive approach brings together both theoretical insights and practical applications: This synergistic approach aims to

generate findings that offer both theoretical significance for academic discourse and practical utility for industry stakeholders.

## **2. Case Description**

The ecosystem surrounding content creators on short video platforms is characterized by a complex and rapidly evolving interplay of competition and cooperation. In this paper, the study will take analysis or critique as the theme—YouTubers vs. Instagrammers 2.0! This study focuses on leading Chinese platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou, which operate within a shared cultural and market context, facilitating a direct comparison of creator strategies. English-speaking rivals like YouTube Shorts also factor into that commentary. This environment is characterized by loosely organized networks of creators who maintain internal cooperation while simultaneously engaging in external competition. Those networks generally specialize in some particular content verticals, like beauty, gaming, lifestyle, or education. Creators within these networks all engage in various cooperative behaviors such as content collaboration (mutual appearances in videos), cross-promotion (channel recommendations), and shared resource pools (equipment, editing services, industry contact agents) [12]. At the same time, they are fierce competitors fighting for market position in their own niches, audience attention, and chances at business deals. These cooperative and competitive behaviors are intensified and shaped by broader platform dynamics and commercial imperatives. Moreover, platforms further complicate this picture by themselves introducing additional levels, such as technology-driven loops of self-reinforcement where successful types of content are quickly identified and repeated, leading simultaneously to both adaptive cooperation and competitive expansion [13]. Commercial aspects have gone beyond simple sponsorship deals to sophisticated multi-creator campaigns, revenue-sharing collaborations, and even joint ventures that launch own-brand products or services. For successful creators who have evolved into media entrepreneurs managing teams, this professionalization has brought issues of competition and cooperation into sharper focus [14]. With the rapidly growing income from online activities, the stakes in this field are significant. New developments include the rise of cross-platform strategies. As creators take up active presence in these other networks, a new stratum of rivalry and cooperation is created. Platforms intervene by using development features (such as improved collaboration tools), adjusting algorithms or policies to transform the landscape where such dynamics operate. Because of this, content creators must constantly change their plans to keep up with the always-changing mix of partnerships and competition.

## **3. The Dual Edges of Collaboration: Analyzing Synergies and Risks in Creator Ecosystems**

### **3.1. Synergistic Effects of Competition and Cooperation**

#### **3.1.1 Innovation for quality and exceptional doing**

The mix of competition and teamwork between creators works like an ongoing game. In this game, their methods change over time to get the best results for themselves and the group. This competition leads to two main benefits: it pushes creators to be more original and it makes the quality of their work better. That is: Better content for a traffic pool leads to better differentiation. During these trials, creators create entirely new formats, attempt brand-new styles, and create novel subjects, all to catch the eyes of viewers because they are all drowning in the same world of noise. For platforms with stationary webpages and increasing creator density, one study found that there is a tally of definitions to be redefined [15].

While competition initiates innovation, cooperation acts as a force multiplier. Methods of cooperation then help to advance innovation: knowledge will spread, skills will be put into practical use, and colleagues will conduct joint experiments. When creators collaborate, they combine their

unique skills, insights, and audience knowledge. This combination often sparks innovations that are unlikely to emerge from any single individual. The resulting benefits extend beyond the collaborating creators to the broader community, as others observe successful approaches, adapt them, and further refine the ideas. Similarly, when creators notice trusted peers—including competitors or partners—effectively applying certain methods, they are encouraged to adopt those practices themselves. This process of observation and emulation leads to a continuous rise in quality standards across the entire creative ecosystem. In addition, the growing trend towards industrialized production with expansion into bigger commercial scale and better equipment, software, and hardware all demand higher quality content.

### **3.1.2 Audience expansion and market growth**

Collaboration among creators significantly accelerates and amplifies audience development, achieving reach far beyond the capabilities of any individual creator. That's because one partner's integrated content lets both sides show out to all the viewers, basically sending them their own particular followers.

One survey of audience movements linked to creator collaborations reveals that there is normally a 15-25% overlap between the two audiences and on the order of 5-10% for every given collaboration's followers who, it turns out, remain permanently with their creator partners. Such expansion of the audience is good for any creator at whatever level of popularity they may be, but it helps people in different ways. Established creators often make use of collaborations to open new demographic segments or categories of content, whereas newbies like creators use partners who are more settled to enter theirs on an express lane.

These cooperative strategies for expanding the audience are particularly effective in enabling creators to break through and transcend the “ceiling of growth” that often follows an era of rapid advance. This phenomenon can be described as overcoming the limitations of a saturated market by leveraging collaborative networks to access new audience segments, effectively expanding the market frontier. From the perspective of the market, these cooperative activities will expand rather than swap around the entire viewership, including all content on short-form video. Cooperative content generally has elevated engagement and sharing rates, drawing in new platform users while also enlarging the entire market. Thus, this market growth 'benefits everybody': Creators get bigger potential audiences, platforms are adding more users to their rolls, and industries have a larger motherload from which to draw new customers.

### **3.1.3 Enhancing engagement and evolving the platform**

Collaborative dynamics among creators will bring user engagement metrics that are indispensable for the platform up a lot higher. For example, in a joint study with Yuan Hui, numbers show that collaborative content typically delivers rates of engagement that are 30-50% higher than those for single work films and videos. Reasons for this enhancement in engagement include novelty value, filial pollination among different audiences, and inherent interest in seeing how two or more creators will work together.

The competition inherent in this boost's audience engagement levels as well through now commenting, liking, or sharing a clip they like to send it up higher. In many cases, the platforms themselves unite to further escalate these competitive aspects through their functional duets, response videos, and support for ranking systems, which consolidate competitive dynamics.

The drive to promote the competitive-cooperative behaviors that form multichannel networks in China derives from these engagement benefits. As companies benefit from creators' work and are able to invest in features to facilitate even greater such cooperation, platform evolution continues along this path: just as recent platform innovations like enhanced collaboration tools through multiple partners, live streaming capabilities in complex productions, or advanced revenue-sharing features all directly cater to and flip back to creators. This process creates a positive cycle. Creators invent new things, which influences the platforms to add new tools. These new tools then allow creators to develop even more advanced strategies.

## **3.2. Emerging Risks and Systemic Challenges**

### **3.2.1 Intellectual property vulnerabilities**

While cooperative creation offers significant benefits, it produces potent intellectual property pitfalls. In this context, “unauthorized knowledge transfer” is often an issue that poses threats to core creative concepts and proprietary content strategies. A paramount risk in collaboration is the unauthorized transfer of knowledge and intellectual property (IP). Necessary sharing of information and the inevitable close cooperation demanded by collaborative content creation together give rise to these risks.

Many entities engaged in creators strongly accentuate such dangers; they often work closely as partners without any written contracts or clear IP sharing arrangements. Even with contracts, enforcing these provisions may prove challenging for legal systems in different countries and jurisdictions that are responsive to the specific context of digital content creation activities.

Awareness of these dangers is often worse among smaller creators whose innovative ideas can prove their worth, but who possess few protections yet have limited resources for protecting their rights. Documented cases exist where larger entities or publishers have appropriated concepts from smaller collaborators without providing due credit or compensation. Argumentation non-time efficiency is precisely this sort of ground that most often encourages the printer.

As well as its immediate impact on earnings, the question of intellectual property can result in a lack of confidence within the creator community, in principle preventing the collaboration that drives ecosystem growth. Creatives are reluctant to work together for fear that their ideas will be copied and not paid for, especially when the potential partner is operating in an adjacent content area.

### **3.2.2 Market concentration and entry barriers**

With colluding trends on the rise among established content creators, the market is now heavily concentrated- for newcomers, there is no easier place to enter. Creating networks and alliances enables top-tier content creators to effectively create a mountain fortress around their audience base, making it ever more difficult for new arrivals to be seen. The algorithms of online platforms reinforce this rule: they preferentially recommend content from well-known creators who produce high-engagement material.

For successful creators, this forms a spiral of positive feedback in which they receive more and more prominent placement. However, new creators have difficulty getting started. This heightened barrier to entry is empirically evidenced by the increasing time and resource investment required for success. Research suggests that across major platforms, the time it takes for creators to reach financial break-even has grown by 40-60% over just three years [16].

Furthermore, the rise of professional content creation has pushed up production quality expectations. This creates a high cost to enter the field. New creators feel they must buy professional gear, editing programs, and hire a team before they can earn any income. This financial wall is especially hard for creators from poorer backgrounds, who often cannot get the startup resources they need.

The combination of these factors limits new voices and perspectives from coming into the picture of original ecological prosperity. As of now, platform metrics are showing a decrease in the rate of creator turnover and an increase in crowd concentration on top author-generated content (from creator earnings data). If this continues, content could become very similar. This would be unhealthy for the entire creative environment. This move toward fewer creators having most of the attention threatens new ideas and variety. In the end, it could damage the long-term strength of the creator community.

### **3.2.3 Reputational contagion and measurement complexities in collaborative campaigns**

While partnering with multiple creators may provide benefits, it also brings with it potential investment risks that are quite different from those that traditional influencer marketing approaches do not pose. These risks originate from the highly interconnected nature of creator relationships. This interconnectedness allows negative impacts to cascade through the network when any single member

encounters a problem. The principal risk here is reputational contagion, where scandals involving one actor might drag those actors paired with him down as well, and then the network member brands. This represents a classic case of negative externality and moral hazard within a network, where the actions of one actor impose unforeseen costs on others, complicating risk assessment and management for all involved parties. Research has found that promotion through association marketing situations can result in up to three generations from the original incident, negative associations between influencer incidents [17].

In addition, the complex relationships between creators in different constituent groups of collective partners raise measurement and attribution problems for campaign performance. As multi-creator campaigns become more common, it is harder to pinpoint the individual contributions of each author. It will also complicate choices regarding optimizing and calculating return on investment.

Moreover, the dynamic relations characterizing multiple creators, along with the way they evolve over time, introduce uncertainty about long-term partnership viability. Groups of closely collaborating creative types today may well be future rivals tomorrow; this status may bring conflict for brands that partner closely with both entities. These dynamics require the sector's higher sophistication of relationship management than was provided for by traditional influencer marketing.

## **4. Proposed Strategies for a Sustainable Ecosystem**

### **4.1. Establishing Robust Intellectual Property Protection Frameworks**

To address the intellectual property vulnerabilities, a multifaceted protection framework is essential. Collaborative endeavors can't do without risk management for intellectual property. Different mechanisms should be developed to meet the needs of digital content creation, each tailored to particular situations and conditions. Platforms can feature a copyright recognition system that is creator-centric, automatically recognizing and attributing individual content elements and overarching concepts across videos while becoming documentation of original creation.

Creator education is another key part, with platforms, industry associations, and management companies creating resources like contract kits to explain to creators the knowledge of intellectual property rights. Furthermore, educational initiatives should be expanded to cover the practical use of electronic signature systems and digital contracts, as well as methods for reporting intellectual property infringements online.

Industry should also develop standardized protocols for citing sources of music, art, or other types of help and compensation used in collaborative content. These norms will make room for both overt creative contributions as well as more indirect accretions by characterizing the relative worth of different kinds of intellectual input equally. Bulk Attribution System optimized content fingerprinting techniques and blockchain-based imprints provide solutions worth exploring on an industry-wide scale. Successful trials using these technologies have logged good results, automatically tracking when content gets reused and remixed while ensuring that its originator is properly credited.

### **4.2. Towards More Balanced and Transparent Algorithmic Distribution**

Countering the trend of market concentration and high entry barriers requires a fundamental rethink of algorithmic distribution systems. Recommendation algorithms should be restructured for better civil rights in the marketplace. These reconstituted systems will at once exploit all possible human potential and break down barriers faced by newcomers to the establishment. Deliberate discovery mechanisms will introduce new, promising creators into a more diverse content landscape alongside the already well-known ones.

Create special algorithmic pathways for evaluating work by newcomers, recognizing that the criteria defining actual engagement may be different than those for people who have been in business longer. For instance, algorithms could incorporate a "weighted growth" metric that assigns a higher value to engagement rates relative to a channel's subscriber base, rather than relying solely on

absolute view counts. Platform pathways might be various probation periods with enhanced visibility for aspiring new creators. It could help them through early growing pains.

Platforms ought also to design and publicize features tailored for existing creators to assist new ones specifically. These features might take the form of formal mentorship programs, matching systems for collaborations between creators at different stages, or sections of the platform set off for inter-level exchanges. Additionally, platforms ought to provide increasingly transparent analytics--helping creators understand better performing on algorithms and theoretical side approaches. Though necessary safeguards against system rigging must be observed, higher visibility can equalize conditions between highly endowed creators who have their own analytics team and independent creators running self-managed one-person channels.

### **4.3. Developing Advanced Risk Assessment Frameworks for Collaborative Campaigns**

Mitigating the complex risks of reputational contagion and measurement challenges in collaborative campaigns demands sophisticated assessment tools. Brands must develop more comprehensive risk assessment frameworks specifically tailored for the multi-creator campaign environment. In addition to evaluating individual creator risks, these frameworks should also assess network risks arising from relationship-driven cooperations between creators.

Network mapping tools can help brands perceive and analyze relations among potential creator partners, disclosing clusters of influence or possible weak spots. Such tools must feature real-time upgrades to reflect the constant flux of creator relationships. Contracts for cooperative campaigns must be updated to handle their special challenges. Contracts must clearly define shared duties, ways to resolve conflicts, and how to judge performance. These agreements need to balance necessary protections with enough freedom for creativity. In addition, companies should create improved methods to track the effectiveness of their campaigns. These methods should consider how multiple creators working together can create a larger overall impact. Both quantitative measurement data and qualitative assessments are among the things these methods should seek to incorporate into their assessments of how group dynamics impact campaign performance.

Insurance products and financial tools designed specifically to hedge influencer marketing risks in collaborative contexts are other fertile development directions. They could inevitably help brands deal with uncertainty while also allowing larger collaborative campaigns.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1. Key Findings**

This study concludes that the interplay between competition and cooperation ('coopetition') is a defining and persistent characteristic of mature short-video platform ecosystems, generating both significant synergies and complex challenges. It also examined the benefits as well as the massive difficulties that arise from these ties. Positive effects include driving content innovations, improving its quality, gaining new audiences, and expanding markets at a faster rate than ever before. Enhanced user engagement directly contributes to platform growth and evolution. From all these benefits arises value enjoyed by everyone in the chain: creators, platforms, sponsors, and viewers, fostering the development of a more robust and interactive digital ecosystem. All benefit from this situation.

However, these dynamics also bring formidable problems with them. In collaborative relationships, for example, intellectual property risks can be high. Full market saturation builds barriers that make it difficult for new authors to make an impression. Brands engaging in multi-creator campaigns must face an increased range of risks. The analysis found that coopetition is fundamentally a characteristic of mature short video platforms, rather than just appearing in transitional stages like it did for websites or e-commerce sites. As part of this development process, these needs should therefore receive special attention and tailored strategies rather than be solved by market mechanisms.

## 5.2. Research Contributions

The study makes contributions at both theoretical and practical levels for understanding digital content ecosystems. Theoretically, it extends the existing literature on platform economics and creator economies by specifically investigating paradoxical coopetition relationships that characterize modern short video networks. This provides a framework for how these contradictory dynamics co-exist and complement each other with strength.

This study offers useful insights for everyone working in these complex environments. For creators, it provides a practical guide for managing the balance between competing for attention and cooperating for growth. It also helps them reduce risks related to protecting their original work and managing their reputation. Platforms gain chances to foster the health of the system through feature development as well as policy enforcement. For brands and advertisers, it offers a risk assessment framework for designing multi-creator campaigns that can leverage network effects while mitigating the potential for negative reputational spillover.

The research also makes practical contributions, discussing platform governance and creator rights. It lays out the evidence-based approaches to issues of intellectual property, market concentration, and fair compensation.

## 5.3. Limitations and Research Trends

This article has several limitations that may indicate future research directions. This study has two main limits. First, it uses only existing data and reports. This gives a wide view but cannot show the personal reasons and decisions of creators, platforms, and brands. Future work should use direct methods like interviews to understand these deeper motives. Second, the research focuses mostly on major short video platforms. This scope is somewhat narrow. Further research could investigate how these dynamics manifest differently in emerging platforms or niche content communities. Third, short-form video platforms are constantly evolving and changing. As a result, specific observations may have a limited lifespan. Further study should track these dynamics over time in order to capture their evolution and directions. Also, in the future, quantifying the precise impact of different coopetition strategies on creator growth, audience engagement, and commercial outcomes could be something that future studies employ. Longitudinal studies that span over time creators' careers, extended periods would be especially useful in understanding how these dynamics evolve at different career stages.

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