

# **Demand Follows Structure: YouTube and Korean Video Podcasting**

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The rapid growth of Korean video podcasting since 2020 reflects a broader shift in how long-form content is produced and consumed on digital platforms. This essay argues that this growth was not driven by pre-existing audience demand, but by YouTube's platform dominance, infrastructural changes, and monetisation incentives, which actively shaped both creator behaviour and audience consumption. Rather than responding to cultural preferences, the platform produced the conditions under which demand for long-form content could emerge.

A "Korean video podcast" refers to Korean language content intended for Korean-speaking audiences, typically with a duration of thirty to sixty minutes. It does not refer to 'K-content' produced for international audiences.

Korean video podcast growth since 2020 has been driven primarily by YouTube's structural promotion of the format and monetization incentives for creators, rather than by pre-existing domestic cultural demand for long-form media.

## **YouTube's Market Dominance in Korea**

YouTube's market dominance in South Korea enabled the growth of video podcasting. YouTube is the most used app in South Korea as of 2025, with 45.65 million active users<sup>1</sup>. Wiseapp data further shows that "30.4 million users spent a total 29.1 billion minutes on the YouTube app as of May 2018"<sup>2</sup>, ranking it highest for time spent on mobile applications. In addition, YouTube ranks first in smart TV viewership<sup>3</sup> while a 2025 Korea Creative Content Agency report found that 37.6% of respondents cited YouTube Music (including YouTube) as their primary platform, ahead of Melon, Genie, and Flo<sup>4</sup>.

Such dominance enables the datafication and commodification of user attention, allowing platforms to shape consumption patterns by structuring visibility and access to content. and

the broader public sphere<sup>5</sup>. YouTube's position within the Korean media market therefore provided the structural conditions for video podcasting to emerge and scale.

### **Platform Integration and the Shift to Podcasting**

YouTube incentivised long-form audio-visual production by integrating podcast infrastructure directly into its platform. In 2021, YouTube introduced a dedicated podcast tab, allowing creators to organise content into podcast-specific playlists. By 2023, YouTube Music had integrated podcast search and playback, and in 2024 Google Podcasts was discontinued, with its content migrated to YouTube. These changes consolidated podcast discovery and consumption within a single platform ecosystem. <sup>6</sup>.

Platforms routinely reorganise their infrastructures to maximise engagement and retain user attention. For example, Facebook's restructuring of its news feed reduced traffic to external media outlets<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, YouTube reduced friction in accessing long-form content by embedding podcast functionality within its platform. These infrastructural changes created the conditions under which both creators and audiences could shift toward video podcasting, not as an organic preference, but as a response to platform design.

Video podcast growth in Korea was therefore not incidental, but the result of deliberate infrastructural changes that incentivised both production and consumption.

### **Video Podcasting as an Emergent Format**

Following YouTube's podcast integration in 2021, Korean creators increasingly adopted the video podcast format. Established creators such as "*Beautiful nerd*"<sup>8</sup> and "*Chim-Chak Man*"<sup>9</sup> pivoted towards long-form podcast content, while newer channels such as "*SPNS TV*"<sup>10</sup> and "*Hocky Pocky Studio*"<sup>11</sup> launched directly in this format. This shift aligns chronologically with the introduction of podcast infrastructure. A part-free/part-paid model also appears consistently across these cases, indicating convergence not only in format but in monetisation strategy. In the attention economy, creators are incentivised to adapt content in response to competitive pressures<sup>12</sup>. The transition towards video podcasting is therefore better understood as a reactive adaptation to platform incentives, than as evidence of pre-existing audience demand.

## **Monetization and Creator Incentives**

The part-free/part-paid advertising model introduced new financial incentives that supported the expansion of video podcasting. Channels such as “SPNS TV”, “Beautiful Nerd” and “Hocky Pocky Studio” release episodes in two parts, with the latter accessible through paid subscription. This structure leverages the cliffhanger effect, encouraging continued consumption through narrative incompleteness<sup>13</sup>. More broadly, monetization strategies on YouTube—both legacy and alternative—diversify creator revenue streams<sup>14</sup>.

By aligning long-form content with subscription income, advertising and engagement-driven design, platforms incentivise the production of formats that maximise attention. These incentives created stable revenue conditions that enabled the persistence and growth of video podcasting on Korean YouTube.

## **Rethinking Cultural Demand**

Claims of a pre-existing cultural preference for long-form content in Korea do not adequately explain the timing or structure of this trend. The rise of video podcasting follows YouTube’s platform changes in 2021, rather than preceding them. Creators themselves have noted that Korean audiences were initially unfamiliar with long-form formats<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, platforms have “penetrated the heart of society” and play an active role in shaping cultural practices<sup>16</sup>.

If demand for long-form audio-visual media had existed independently, earlier adoption would be expected. Instead, demand appears to have emerged after the introduction of enabling infrastructure. Cultural preference, in this case, is better understood as an outcome of platform dynamics rather than a causal driver.

## **Conclusion**

The rise of Korean video podcasting since 2020 is best understood as a platform-mediated development rather than an organic cultural shift. YouTube’s market dominance, infrastructural integration, and monetisation systems created the conditions that enabled and sustained the format’s growth. In this context, audience demand does not precede platform design but emerges from it.

Demand follows structure. As platforms continue to reshape systems of visibility, distribution, and monetisation, they will continue to play a decisive role in producing the forms of media that audiences come to consume.

- 1 IIGAWorks, *Mobile Index Report* (2023).
- 2 “유튜브, 모바일 동영상 앱서도 ‘지존’..점유율 86%,” *GameTOC*, 2018.  
<https://www.gametoc.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=48184>
- 3 “오디오 시장까지 장악한 유튜브,” *PD Journal*, 2024. <https://www.pdjournal.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=80640>
- 4 “Korean Music Platforms Vie to Overtake YouTube Music,” *Chosun Ilbo*, January 14, 2026.  
<https://www.chosun.com/english/travel-food-en/2026/01/14/6MPQGDNT2VFWBBRSWNQJZ3OB74/>
- 5 José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal, *The Platform Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 46.
- 6 “Google Podcasts to Shut Down in 2024 with Listeners Migrated to YouTube Music,” *TechCrunch*, September 26, 2023. <https://techcrunch.com/2023/09/26/google-podcasts-to-shut-down-in-2024-with-listeners-migrated-to-youtube-music>
- 7 van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, *The Platform Society*, 65.
- 8 뷰티풀너드, YouTube channel.
- 9 침착맨, YouTube channel.
- 10 SPNS TV, YouTube channel.
- 11 하키포키 스튜디오, YouTube channel.
- 12 Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants* (New York: Knopf, 2016), 50.
- 13 Maya Hazarika, “The Psychology of Cliffhangers,” *Medium*, 2026. <https://medium.com/@maya.l.hazarika/the-psychology-of-cliffhangers-b7f60c4c6815>
- 14 “Characterizing Alternative Monetization Strategies on YouTube”(2022 report) , p.21, Section 8 .
- 15 SPNS TV, episode 88, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6FYD613ZWU>
- 16 van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, *The Platform Society*, 13.

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YouTube channels:

뷰티풀너드. YouTube channel.

침착맨. YouTube channel.

SPNS TV. YouTube channel.

하키포키 스튜디오. YouTube channel.