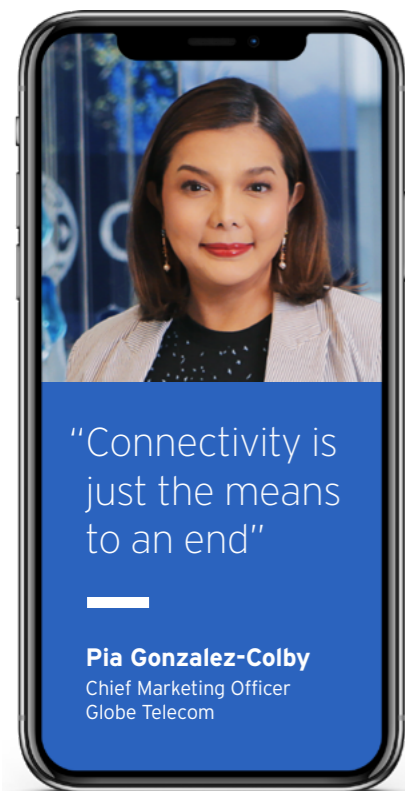


IF YOU BUILD IT THEY WILL COME

A reliable mobile network is just the beginning: the most innovative providers must think vertically when it comes to supporting participants in the growing creator economy. It's a unique opportunity for telecoms companies



Social commerce is on the rise, with the industry expected to grow at an annual rate of 21 percent globally from 2020 to 2025. And, as the content creation market grows, telecom companies have an opportunity to support its cast of players: creators, social sellers and the ecosystem of businesses that has developed around it.



"Connectivity is just the means to an end," says Pia Gonzalez-Colby, Chief Marketing Officer for Globe Telecom, the operator of the largest mobile network in the Philippines. "The most innovative telcos are creating new business models and propositions to power this emerging economy. We are finding ways to support social commerce and reposition ourselves from being simply core connectivity providers, to total digital enablers."

From content consumption to content creation

Filipinos are among the world's most active internet users, spending around ten and a half hours a day online. It is naturally fertile ground for social commerce, with the number of content creators growing by 29 percent in the past two years.

As more and more internet users upload and stream content, network capacity and reliability become ever more vital. As novel immersive technologies such as the metaverse develop and sales of digital goods increase, their importance will continue to scale, Gonzalez-Colby predicts. Not only do developments such as 5G and 6G support the creator economy but, cyclically, the creator economy also creates a necessity for reliable network infrastructure.

"There will eventually need to be a global minimum standard for internet infrastructure in order to allow citizens to access the benefits of the metaverse, augmented reality and virtual reality. As more people move from simply content consumption to content creation, network capacity and reliability will be key," Gonzalez-Colby says.

Powering social connections

Critical network infrastructure aside, to power this new paradigm and remain relevant to customers, telcos will need to go beyond the basics of connectivity. Colby explains that, in prepaid mobile markets such as the Philippines, where the vast majority of consumers are financially constrained, content creators need more than affordable and reliable access to the internet. They also need access to tools and services that will enable them to create and publish their content, boost followership, and make and receive payments.

"Content creators need their telco providers to lower the barriers to entry for social

commerce," adds Gonzalez-Colby. "At Globe, we have propositions including Go Hustle, which help creators to maximise their potential through coaching from industry experts. We run Creator Camps, where content creators learn key production and monetisation skills, and we offer access to content creation apps, social platform marketplaces and video and multimedia editing tools." Globe also partners with platforms such as TikTok on the TikTok Creator Awards; Kumu, a fast-growing creator platform; and have instigated Globe Virtual Hangouts, which allows users to build "followership" among more than 87mn customers. Virtual Hangouts lets people build online spaces based on shared interests in a 360-degree metaverse experience.



Powering the proposition through vertical integration

Marketing initiatives are only the tip of the iceberg for telecom companies. The philosophy of vertical integration, which made the smartphone ecosystem what it is, and which begat a multibillion dollar creator

economy, is the same approach that is giving them the capacity to move into the social commerce market. It lets companies such as Globe do way more than they were once expected to - provided they grasp the potential.

Colby continues: "We are in a unique position to be able to draw on the entire Globe ecosystem that spans AdSpark Holdings, an adtech conglomerate; Kroma, a tradigital entertainment company focused on creators, talent and technology; Pie, the country's first phygital broadcasting channel; and, of course, our mobile wallet GCash. These, and the many other fintech companies under our 917 Ventures incubator, allow us to be agile and develop a really rich and holistic proposition for social entrepreneurs and content creators."

Protection for creators

As with any developing industry, there are risks involved in social commerce. Aside from the well-known consumer data protection issues, there also are intellectual property infringement concerns among content creators. For the industry to flourish, Gonzalez-Colby says, intellectual property regulatory frameworks need to be updated for the digital age. This is why, she says, Globe has launched an anti-piracy advocacy #PlayItRight. "Aside from educating the public on the importance of respecting intellectual property ownership, we are also actively lobbying for regulations that protect Filipino content creators and ultimately safeguard their livelihood."

