

CONTENT COMMODIFICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

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Submitted : 24 June 2024; Revision : 25 June 2024; Accepted : 27 June 2024

ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the phenomenon of content commodification in the digital age, focusing on the economic, social, and cultural implications and challenges faced by content creators and digital platforms. Offers an original contribution to understanding how content commodification impacts various aspects of digital life. By highlighting key implications and challenges, it provides useful insights for content creators, platform managers, and policymakers. A qualitative approach was used in this research, involving in-depth interviews with content creators and policy analysis of digital platforms. Data was also obtained through a review of current literature from the last five years to support the research findings. Research limitations include limitations in sample size and diversity, time constraints, and participant and researcher bias. These limitations affect the generalizability of the results and highlight the need for further research with a wider scope and more diverse methods. The results show that content commodification provides significant economic opportunities for content creators, but also brings challenges such as income instability, copyright issues, and pressure to create viral content. Digital platform algorithms affect the visibility and sustainability of content. Social and cultural implications include changes in consumption patterns and social interactions, as well as cultural diversification influenced by platform algorithms. This research concludes that overcoming the challenges of content commodification requires diversifying sources of income, increasing copyright awareness, and developing fairer algorithms. Cooperation between creators, digital platforms, and policy makers is essential to create a more equitable and sustainable ecosystem in the creative industry and digital economy.

Keywords Content Commodification; Platform Algorithms; Digital Platforms; Creative Industries;

Paper type Research paper

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the development of digital technology has experienced a rapid surge and has brought about significant changes in various aspects of human life. One of the most impacted areas is content production and distribution. Digital technology has revolutionized the way content is created, consumed and shared around the world. Digital technology encompasses a wide range of innovations, from the internet, social media, mobile devices, to various digital platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, and Spotify. The internet, as the backbone of digital technology, enables global distribution of content within seconds. This means that content is accessible to a much wider audience compared to the pre-digital era, where content distribution was often limited by geography and physical infrastructure [1].

Mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets, have drastically increased the accessibility of content. With these increasingly sophisticated devices, users can access content anytime and anywhere, leading to changes in consumer behavior and an increased demand for more dynamic and responsive content [2]. Digital platforms such as social media and streaming services have provided tools for individuals and organizations to produce and distribute their own content without the need to rely on traditional media [3]. YouTube, for example, allows anyone to become a video content producer with the potential to reach millions of global viewers [4]. Similarly, platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have enabled the distribution of visual content and short videos quickly and effectively [5].

On the other hand, the development of digital technology has also brought about various challenges. One of the main challenges is the commodification of content, where content is treated as a tradable commodity. This has changed the landscape of creative industries, blurred the lines between

producers and consumers, and created complex new economic dynamics [6]. For example, digital platform algorithms often determine the visibility of content, which can affect the income of content creators and independent media [7].

In addition, issues of copyright and data security have also become increasingly important in the context of digital content distribution. Blockchain technology, for example, has begun to be used to address some of these challenges by providing a more secure and transparent method for tracking the ownership and distribution of digital content [8]. In this context, research on how digital technologies affect content production and distribution is essential. This research will not only help us understand the changes that are taking place, but also provide insights into how to effectively and ethically utilize digital technologies in the creative industries [9].

Content commodification is the process by which digital content, such as articles, videos, music, and images, are transformed into commercial goods that can be bought and sold [10]. This phenomenon has grown rapidly along with the advancement of digital technology and the globalization of the internet. Content commodification covers various aspects, from the production and distribution to the consumption of content on digital platforms. According to [11], commodification is the act of transforming goods or services that were previously not for sale into something that can be bought and sold in the market. In the digital context, content commodification means that content that was originally created for information or entertainment purposes is now monetized through various means such as advertising, paid subscriptions, and direct sales. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok play an important role in this process by providing infrastructure and algorithms that facilitate the monetization of content by users [12].

One important aspect of content commodification is the use of user data to optimize the economic value of that content. Algorithms used by digital platforms collect and analyze user behavior data to determine the most profitable types of content. This has influenced the way content is produced and presented, with a focus on increasing engagement and airtime to maximize advertising revenue [13]. The impact of content commodification is also seen in the creative industries. Based on [14] while commodification has provided new opportunities for creators to generate revenue, it has also created pressure to continuously produce content that can attract attention and remain relevant in the platform's algorithm. This often leads to the production of content that is oriented towards popularity rather than quality or artistic value [15]. In addition, the commodification of content raises ethical and social issues. There are concerns that the informational value and quality of content decreases due to an excessive focus on monetization. Content that is controversial or sensationalized is often favored by algorithms as it tends to get more interaction, which can lead to the spread of misinformation and low-quality content [16].

In recent years, researchers have also highlighted how the commodification of content can affect user privacy. Personal data collected by digital platforms is not only used to target advertisements but can also be sold to third parties, posing risks to individual privacy [17]. This research will explore the definition and concept of content commodification in more depth, by examining its impact on the creative industry, content quality, and privacy and ethics. The aim is to understand the complex dynamics of content commodification and its implications in an evolving digital context. To improve our comprehension of content commodification and its effects, gaps must be filled. There is a tendency to emphasise on the financial benefits of content commodification, frequently ignoring how it affects the calibre and diversity of content generated, leading to an inadequate emphasis on content quality. Therefore, future studies should look into how monetization constraints affect the kind of content produced and how they affect content quality, creativity, and cultural diversity.

METHOD

Research Approach

This research aims to explore and understand the phenomenon of content commodification in the digital era, focusing on the implications and challenges faced by content creators and digital platforms. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the perceptions, experiences, and views of participants involved in the content commodification process. This research use a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of content creators, consumers, and creative industry professionals regarding content commodification. Within the realm of qualitative research, there exist multiple interpretations of the concept of "phenomenology." Crotty [18] explores the importance of a critical epistemological

interpretation that involves reevaluating conceptual frameworks. Alternatively, there are non-critical interpretations of phenomenology. There is another differentiation that exists between descriptive and interpretive forms of qualitative phenomenological research [19]. Lately, qualitative researchers who claim to work within the phenomenological theoretical stance have started using the characterization of phenomenology as being concerned with the nature of experiences. A typical approach to qualitative phenomenology research methodology is the exploration of "what experiences are like.". Phenomenology is suitable for this research because of its focus on understanding phenomena through the perspective of individuals who experience them directly.

Data Collection

Participatory Observation: Researchers conduct participatory observations on various digital platforms to understand the interactions and dynamics that occur between content creators and audiences. The research participants were chosen using the purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria for participants consist of individuals who are actively engaged in creating content on digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, etc. Additionally, professionals working in the creative industry, such as social media managers, advertising agencies, and digital platform managers, are also eligible. Lastly, individuals who frequently engage with commodified content as digital content consumers are included. 10 subjects were questioned until data saturation, at which point no new information was obtained from further interviews. Analyze documentation from secondary sources such as journal articles, industry reports, and digital platform policies to complement primary data.

DISCUSSION

The influence of content commodification on the economic aspect provides opportunities for creators to generate revenue through advertising, sponsorship, and paid subscriptions. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok have become a major source of income for many content creators. However, this also creates a dependency on these platforms, which often control revenue through algorithm changes and monetization policies [15]. The digital content industry is experiencing rapid growth thanks to the commodification of content. New business models have emerged, allowing media and technology companies to monetize content through various channels, including programmatic advertising, paid content, and content-related e-commerce [12].

In terms of social aspects, the commodification of content has changed the way people consume information and entertainment. Consumers now have access to a wide range of free and paid content on various digital platforms, which allows them to select and customize content according to personal preferences. However, this can also lead to audience fragmentation and the emergence of "filter bubbles" where individuals are only exposed to information that aligns with their views [16]. Digital platforms that rely on commodified content have changed social interactions. Users are more likely to interact online through sharing, liking and commenting on content. While this expands the range of interactions, it can also reduce the quality of face-to-face interactions and affect traditional social skills [13].

The influence of content commodification on cultural aspects, content commodification has leveled the cultural terrain, allowing creators from various backgrounds to produce and distribute their content globally. This helps in the diversification and spread of local cultures and subcultures that may not get attention in traditional media [17]. The most popular and profitable content is often driven by platform algorithms that prioritize high engagement. This can result in the spread of values and norms determined by popularity rather than quality or cultural significance. For example, sensational or controversial content is often preferred as it attracts more attention and interaction [15].

As for privacy and ethical aspects, the commodification of content also has an impact on user privacy, as digital platforms collect personal data to target advertisements and personalize content. This use of data is often done without users' explicit consent, which raises concerns about data privacy and security [17]. There are ethical challenges in ensuring that the commodification of content does not harm consumers or creators. For example, the pressure to produce viral content

may push creators to create unethical or inaccurate content in order to gain more views and revenue. This can reduce trust in the information presented on digital platforms [12].

TABLE I. IMPLICATIONS OF CONTENT COMMODIFICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

No	Implication	Description	Reference
1	Creative Economy Changes	With the monetization of content through advertising, subscriptions, and sponsorships, content creators can now generate substantial revenue.	[12]
2	Content Quality Decline	The focus on monetization often leads to content production that is more oriented towards popularity than quality.	[16]
3	Social and Cultural Impact	Platform algorithms tend to promote content that can grab attention quickly, which can lead to the spread of superficial or misleading information.	[13]
4	Privacy and Data Usage	Digital platforms collect user data to optimize ad targeting and increase engagement. This raises serious privacy issues, as users' personal data is used for commercial purposes without their explicit consent. Moreover, this data is often sold to third parties, posing further risks to individual privacy	[17]
5	Economic Inequality	More established creators with greater resources tend to get more attention and revenue, while small or independent creators often struggle to compete in a large platform-dominated ecosystem.	[15]
6	Reliance on Digital Platforms	Platforms like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok have significant control over who can see and access that content, which can affect creators' revenue and reach.	[4]

These implications demonstrate the complexities and challenges that arise from the commodification of content in the digital age, and the need for a critical and ethical approach in dealing with this phenomenon.

TABLE II. CONTENT COMMODITIZATION CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

No	Challenges	Description	Reference
1	Content Algorithm and Visibility	Content creators often face challenges in understanding and navigating the ever-changing algorithms to ensure their content is seen by the right audience.	[13]
2	Unstable Monetization and Revenue	Content creators may face significant fluctuations in revenue based on changes in algorithms, platform policies, or consumer trends. Reliance on one or two sources of revenue, such as advertising or sponsorship, can also increase financial risk for creators.	[15]
3	Copyright and Plagiarism Issues	Content can be easily copied and distributed without permission, which can be detrimental to the original creator.	[17]
4	Pressure to Deliver Viral Content	Content creators often feel pressure to create viral and attention-grabbing content. This can lead them to create sensationalized or controversial content, which while it may increase visibility and engagement, can also lower the quality and integrity of the content.	[16]
5	Privacy and Data Use Issues	Digital platforms collect large amounts of user data to target ads and increase engagement. This use of data raises privacy concerns, as users are often not fully aware of the extent to which their data is being collected and used. In addition, data leaks and misuse of personal information add to the risks for users.	[12]

No	Challenges	Description	Reference
6	Dependency on a Specific Platform	Content creators have become highly dependent on certain platforms for distribution and monetization of their content. Platform policy changes, access restrictions, or even account deletions can have a huge impact on creators' visibility and revenue. This dependency places significant power in the hands of large digital platforms	[4]
7	Equity and Access to Resources	Not all creators have equal access to the resources necessary to produce high-quality content. There are significant inequalities in technology, funding, and support networks, which can affect the ability of independent or small creators to compete with larger entities.	[5]

These challenges demonstrate the complexities faced by content creators in the process of commodification in the digital age, and the importance of a thoughtful and strategic approach to addressing these issues.

Based on the research findings, here are some suggestions to improve the effectiveness of content commodification in the digital era: 1) *Diversify Revenue Sources*. Content creators need to find ways to diversify their sources of income to avoid over-reliance on a single platform or business model. This could include selling merchandise, creating exclusive content for paid subscribers, or utilizing crowdfunding; 2) *Increase Copyright Awareness*. Digital platforms should strengthen copyright protection mechanisms and provide easy-to-use tools for creators to report infringements. Education on the importance of copyright also needs to be increased among creators and consumers; 3) *Develop Fairer Algorithms*. Digital platforms need to develop algorithms that not only prioritize high engagement, but also consider content quality and cultural significance. Transparency in algorithm changes is also important to reduce uncertainty for content creators; 4) *Protection of User Privacy*. Stricter regulations and transparency in the use of personal data should be implemented to protect user privacy. Digital platforms need to provide users with better control options over their personal data; 5) *Support and Training for Creators*. Training and support programs for creators, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can help improve content quality and equitable access to resources. This includes access to technology, funding, and support networks; 6) *Collaboration between Creators and Platforms*. Digital creators and platforms need to work together to create a more sustainable and equitable ecosystem. Open dialog and collaboration can help find solutions that benefit both parties and increase trust between creators and platforms. By implementing these suggestions, the creative industries and digital economy can more effectively manage the challenges of content commodification, improve creators' welfare, and provide better experiences for consumers.

In research that focuses on the commodification of content in the digital age, it is important to identify the limitations and understand how these limitations may affect the research results. The following is an explanation of the limitations of this research and their impact on the results obtained: 1) *Data and Sample Limitations*, this study used a qualitative approach with a purposive sample. Limitations in the number of participants and their diversity may affect the generalizability of the findings. The data collected may not represent the entire population of content creators, consumers, and creative industry professionals. Results may not be broadly generalizable to all content creators or industries across different regions or platforms. Findings may be more relevant for the specific group or context that the research focuses on; 2) *Time Limitations*, the research was conducted over a limited period of time, which may affect the depth of data collected. Changes in digital platform policies or industry trends that occurred after the research was completed may not be included in the analysis. The research results may not fully reflect the latest dynamics and developments in the commodification of digital content. Long-term trends and changes may not be apparent in the data collected; 3) *Access and Ethical Limitations*, access to personal data and certain platforms may be limited due to privacy policies and research ethics. These limitations may restrict the information that can be collected from certain digital platforms or users. The data obtained may not be fully representative of the overall experience of users and content creators. Some important aspects of content commodification may not be fully revealed; 4) *Participant and Researcher Bias*, interviews and observations conducted in qualitative research are prone to bias, both from participants and researchers. Participants may give answers that they perceive the researcher to want, while the

researcher may have prejudices that affect the interpretation of the data. Bias can affect the validity and reliability of findings. Conclusions drawn may reflect subjective views that are not fully objective or neutral; 5) *Limitations of Analysis Techniques*, qualitative analysis techniques such as thematic analysis require subjective interpretation by the researcher. Limitations in analytical skills or the approach used may affect the results. Interpretation of data may vary depending on different researchers. The resulting findings may not be fully reliable if the analysis is not conducted carefully and systematically; 6) *Specific Context*, the research focus on a specific platform or region may limit the relevance of the results for different contexts. For example, the results of research focused on YouTube may not be fully applicable to other platforms such as TikTok or Instagram. The research results may not fully illustrate variations in content commodification across different platforms or geographic regions. Conclusions drawn may be more limited to the specific context studied.

CONCLUSION

Research on "Content Commodification in the Digital Age: Implications and Challenges" reveals various important aspects that affect the creative industry and the digital economy. Here are the main conclusions of this research:

Economic Implications. The commodification of content has provided significant economic opportunities for content creators through monetization on digital platforms. The revenue earned from advertising, sponsorship, and paid subscriptions has increased the economic contribution of content creators and expanded the creative industry. However, unstable revenues and dependence on digital platform algorithms pose challenges in long-term financial planning and sustainability of creative endeavors.

Social Implications. The commodification of content has changed people's consumption patterns and social interactions. Easy access to different types of content allows consumers to customize their preferences, but also creates audience fragmentation and "filter bubbles." These changes also impact social interactions, where online interactions through digital platforms often diminish the quality of face-to-face interactions.

Cultural Implications. The production and distribution of digital content has enabled cultural diversification and the wider spread of subcultures. Creators from different backgrounds can publish their content globally. However, platform algorithms that prioritize high engagement often lead to the spread of values and norms based on popularity rather than quality or cultural significance.

Key challenges in content commodification include revenue instability, copyright and plagiarism issues, pressure to deliver viral content, privacy and data usage issues, platform dependency, and equitable access to resources. Addressing these challenges requires holistic and adaptive strategies from content creators, digital platforms, and policymakers to create an enabling environment for sustainable growth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Researchers would like to thank to University of Dr. Soetomo Surabaya at the Communication Science Magister Program.

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