



## Commodification of Workers and Quality of Reporting on YouTube

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### ABSTRACT

In the digital era, a number of media use YouTube to distribute their content in order to gain new profit opportunities from social media. This research aims to determine the commodification of workers on YouTube and determine its impact on the quality of news. The research uses qualitative methods with a case study approach and data collection using documentation and literature studies. The results of this research found that the heavy work carried out by media workers and the minimal wages of media workers because they are not equivalent to a journalist's living wage mean that the practice of commodification is still ongoing. YouTube is one of the media's efforts to maintain its existence, so that the creativity of content creators becomes evidence of the commodification of workers which provides profits for the media. Regarding the quality of news, this research found that content creators generally only pursue what is common to public consumption, so the news that is broadcast is generally only done to meet normative quality standards.

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### 1. Introduction

Indonesian society is already in the midst of the digital communication era. The flow of circulating information has become easily accessible, but the information obtained must be sorted properly in the current era of information flooding. For example, currently news is not only obtained through reports on television, but also from a number of social media. The flow of information from the news, whose quality must be maintained, is also related to the workers who produce news content (Ashari, 2020).

Digital development in Indonesia can be said to be growing very rapidly, this is proven by the results of the We Are Social Hootsuite Survey which shows that there are 204.7 million Indonesians who are internet users as of February 2022. This figure is the same as 73.7% of the Indonesian population (Evanalia, 2022). Meanwhile, as many as 191.4 million people are active on social media or 68.9% of the Indonesian population. We Are Social Hootsuite as of February

2022 also describes the most widely used social media in Indonesia, namely WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Data on internet users in Indonesia is increasing every year, mainstream media as a source of news production is developing news content distribution platforms from conventional media to new media. As is done by mainstream media, especially TV news, which is transforming into the digital world and distributing their content to digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, even TikTok. To increase the quantity of content on social media, mainstream media also applies social media journalism in producing their content. Social Media Journalism in question is carrying out journalistic work processes by utilizing digital platforms, searching for materials, producing and distributing the content they create on social media. From a comparison of the three most watched news TVs that have converged and carried out social media journalism, namely MetroTV, TVOne and KompasTV, KompasTV became the first news TV to carry out social media journalism work processes starting in 2013, while MetroTV and TVOne started in 2015 (Hidayat et al., 2023).

Of course, with news TV carrying out the social media journalism process and distributing television content to social media platforms, resources or workers are needed to do this. The workers needed are many and have certain skills in the digital and social media fields, such as knowledge and skills regarding SEO and social media optimization (Ichsan et al., 2023). The second social media most widely used by Indonesian people is YouTube. Mainstream media and online media have finally become aware of the profit opportunities from the YouTube social media platform because of its nature which can provide a variety of content and a wide audience reach, anyone can upload content, and presents community features that can generate high levels of audience or netizen interaction. connected to each other (Karren dan Patricia Robin, 2023). The media prefers YouTube to distribute news rather than WhatsApp social media which can only be reached when we share content to the user's personal number.

To gain revenue or profits from social media, you need a large quantity of content and a large number of views or viewers. If on television the determinants of a TV's economic profits are ratings and sharing, then on social media the determinants of economic profits are monetization based on traffic and views (Lestari, 2019). There are two keys to the success of content broadcast on YouTube. The key to success is views (the number of people who watch the content) and watch time (how long people watch the content). When viewers watch videos with a longer duration, there are more opportunities to insert various advertisements. YouTube encourages Content Creators to pursue views and watch time. The higher the views and watch time, the greater the potential for incoming advertising. The more advertisements that come in, the more money or profits come into the company. To calculate how much profit can be obtained from one piece of content broadcast on YouTube, you can use the revenue per impression or RPM formula, namely the total income per 1,000 impressions (views) after sharing the results with YouTube. The average nominal RPM obtained from one video is 1 US dollar per 1,000 views, but this nominal RPM also depends on the type of advertisement shown in the video on YouTube.

From the explanation above, a number of media that use YouTube to distribute their content in order to gain new profit opportunities from social media, inevitably have to achieve high views and watch time for high profits. To get views and watch time, companies need a lot of content (Maulana & Astagini, 2021). This content is obtained from the productivity of their workers or Content Creators every day (Muslikhin et al., 2021).

In the political economy theory expressed by Vincent Mosco, there are three things related to political economy, namely commodification, spatialization and structuration. Commodification is the process of transforming goods and services that were initially valued for their use value into valuable commodities because they can bring profits. Commodification is divided into three, namely content commodification, audience commodification, and worker commodification (Pertwi, 2023; Pratopo, 2018). Meanwhile, spatialization is the distribution of products by the media to the public or audience without being hindered by space and time by utilizing advances in communication technology. For example, spatialized mainstream media

utilizes technology and digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok to spread their products or content to the public.

Spatialization is divided into two, namely horizontal spatialization, which is defined as media companies owning other businesses that have nothing to do with their original business, such as media businesses, hotels, restaurants and others. Meanwhile, vertical spatialization is an integration process by the parent company and subsidiaries carried out in one business line to create synergy, especially to control media production (Paramitha, 2022). The final point is structuration connecting political economy with sociology which organizes social relations such as social class, gender and race.

This research focuses on the commodification of workers in mass media, namely how workers utilize their abilities, energy and thoughts to bring profits to the company as has been done in previous research. Sudarsono (2018) said that the commodification of workers in the world of television entertainment is currently driving production and distribution activities. Utilization of the energy and thoughts of workers in the world of television entertainment can occur optimally by constructing their thoughts on how to please the target audience, even if the wages do not meet expectations. Maulana & Astagini (2021) found a similar thing, that the practice of commodification often occurs in television stations, the practice of which is not realized by reporters. A false consciousness is formed where reporters think that working at a television station is a manifestation of their ideals and desires, so they do not consider this work as a burden, and carry out the various tasks and responsibilities given to them well. Karren dan Patricia Robin (2023) research states that assistant producers often experience commodification because they are treated as additional workers responsible for administrative and technical work which has a negative impact on the assistant producer's motivation and productivity. Even though the assistant producer is a key element in ensuring the smooth running of podcast production. Supported by the results of Pertiwi (2023) research which explains that television producers are often unaware of the commodification process they are experiencing, even though they experience absolute exploitation in the form of relatively long working hours and relative exploitation in the form of double workloads. Producers accept exploitation as something normal because of the processes of alienation, mystification, reification and naturalization caused by the lack of human resources and high demands from clients.

The more content created by workers, the more profitable the company will be. In digital political economy theory, Fuchs and Sevigani initiated the concept of digital labor, which means a form of exploitation of unpaid social media users and is part of content creativity to seek profit. This content creativity is then used by YouTube to make a profit through the large number of audiences who watch the content. Meanwhile, to measure the commodification of workers in digital-based news media, five elements initiated by Karl Marx can be used, namely exploitation, alienation, mystification, reification and naturalization (Priyatna & Maryani, 2023).

Exploitation is the excessive use of workers for economic interests without considering justice and welfare compensation. Alienation is a form of worker alienation from their own work after experiencing exploitation of their abilities. The next stage is reification as a form of the process of reducing the human dimension to mere objects due to the disappearance of creativity. When it is in the reification stage, appearing in the Mystification stage when commodities are released from the workers, the exchange process is enriched with certain meanings rather than just use value which in the end the workers will be in the naturalization stage when industrial efforts are considered normal, ordinary and reasonable and acceptance of exploitative relations between capital owners and workers (Ritonga, 2023).

With the commodification of workers which prioritizes the quantity of content rather than the quality of a broadcast, there is an impact of technological change and worker exploitation (Sari, 2023). An undesirable impact, for example, is that the quality of the news decreases because media workers do not have enough time to create or produce news that is quality, long, in-depth and presents with more complete related data. Especially when media workers are required to get a lot of content, lots of views and follow trends or developments in news issues that are viral or trending that day. Quality news content in the era of massive information flow can be done by creating data-based journalism products. Data journalism is

used to improve the quality of reporting which not only describes the surface content informing about the occurrence of an event, but must be able to give meaning to the event (Evanalia, 2022).

The focus of the problem of this research is how the commodification of media workers in KompasTV's digital division, especially their Content Creator section in producing news videos so that the company can benefit from YouTube monetization, uses an analysis of the five elements initiated by Karl Max, namely exploitation, alienation, mystification, reification and naturalization. Apart from that, this research focuses on the impact of the commodification of workers on the quality of reporting. Meanwhile, the aim of this research is to find out the commodification of workers at KompasTV, especially in production on YouTube KompasTV and to find out how the quality of reporting is an impact of the commodification of workers.

## **2. Method**

This research uses qualitative research methods, which according to Moleong (2020) is defined as research that aims to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects (behavior, motivation and actions) holistically and by means of descriptions in the form of words and language, in a special natural context and by utilizing various natural methods. The approach used in this research is a case study was conducted to find out the commodification of workers at KompasTV, especially in production on KompasTV YouTube and to find out how the quality of reporting is an impact of the commodification of workers. Data collection was carried out through non-structural interviews with Kompas TV Youtube production workers with a total of 6 informants, which was then supported by a study of documentation data on the KompasTV Youtube content creation schedule.

## **3. Analysis and Results**

### **3.1. Media Interest in the Content displayed**

Media content always reflects the interests of those who finance it. From this fact it can be concluded that the rulers of television media sources are entrepreneurs. The ideology of an entrepreneur's activity is to sell something to gain profit. Without profits the company will close. The media business is a very lucrative business. The media has its own interests, so the messages conveyed are also regulated in such a way. For example, professional media techniques involve representing news through the use of repeated narrative and denotative schemes. The assumptions created by this representation are objectivity, truth and knowledge about the viewer to absorb a certain version of the world (Jhanattan, 2020). Therefore, the media sometimes makes us stereotype something because there are many certain aspects that the media selects as things that they think are worthy of being reported on, while there are also several other aspects that are separated because they do not fit into the recurring narrative and denotative scheme.

Reports made by YouTube KompasTV, for example regarding conflicts between politicians, criminals versus the authorities or vice versa (negative issues) are generally made to fit the scheme. For KompasTV, conveying news or information in this way means providing consistency and offering value that the media previously wanted to offer to the public (Sholahuddin, 2019). Representation can make the feelings of the audience who read or hear it become strong and strong and create visual imagination in everyday life. The relationship between content and ownership lies in the media owner having the power to eliminate the potential for influencing content.

There are three main ways why media ownership can influence media content creation decisions, namely (1) They can manage the budget and routines of media organizations; (2) Can organize news through selection and framing processes; and (3) hire and fire employees.

The political economy perspective emphasizes that if we want to understand media content, and especially its ideological character, we must begin by looking more closely at the ownership and control of the media industry and their relationship with a group of political

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and economic elites in society (Sударsono, 2018). If the culture of production is carried out, dominated endlessly by seeking profit and carried out by those who have various economic interests, then the political economy perspective leads us to conclude that the victims are media content which directly challenges capitalist interests. According to Gillian Doyle, one of the main concerns of media ownership is the risk to democracy and to the larger political system when media owners gain more control over the media. Democracy will be threatened if media owners have the power to propagate a political view (Ulya, 2019).

### **3.2. Commodification of News as a Power in the Political Economy of the Media**

News is information that is important and/or interesting for the audience. Information can be said to be important if the information influences or has an impact on the audience. This information is considered to be newsworthy. News becomes a commodity, because news is bought and sold through news agents (Uhaib et al., 2022). Freelance journalists are paid based on the news they produce for television. Viewed from the perspective of the news audience, market information about social groups and their levels of learning is sold and bought at a price on economic relations between social groups. This information helps determine advertising rates placed between news slots on commercial television. Commodification and market influence are pervasive (Wibisono & Vera, 2022).

In mass media, three things are interrelated, namely media content, audience size and advertising. News or media content is a commodity to increase the number of audiences. The number of audiences is also a commodity that can be sold to advertisers (Pratopo, 2018). The political economy of media apart from controlling media content from within by creating content according to the wishes of media owners, also controls media from outside through interventions carried out by advertisers. So that media content, apart from being influenced by media owners, is also influenced by advertisers from that media in order to get as many audiences as possible.

Using news sources and videos from YouTube is also often considered unintelligent. So that deficiencies appear in every content it produces (Wibisono & Vera, 2022). The use of news sources from social media is also considered to have minimal credibility and validity of the information. The only advantages in this program are the ease of producing it and the entertainment element in it. News should be information-oriented which provides more important information in it. The function of news as a conveyor of information must be to increase public awareness and shape public opinion in a healthy manner, but now it has turned into exchange value. Unfortunately, people as consumers are reluctant to accept this entertainment.

People don't even realize that Youtube KompasTV has used them as a money-making tool. With up-to-date news, it has succeeded in gaining a place in the hearts of the people. This is proven by the number of shares and ratings and its existence. Therefore, society should be aware of its current position. Youtube KompasTV still offers something that is artificially offered by capitalists, its function is nothing other than as a tool to generate profits through the main commodity, namely, news (Paramitha, 2022; Pertiwi, 2023).

The public considers television to be the easiest solution for finding entertainment. Not many of them are aware that mainstream media is an industry in which there are production, distribution and consumption processes. Society as active consumers is created to be consumptive of media. What the public conveys is a form of contribution and support for a show. This understanding needs to be formed in society so that people are aware that their contributions are used by the authorities, both in terms of profit and power. Currently, society is also required to choose the information it will receive as proof of awareness of the existence of capitalists.

Commodification in KompasTV's YouTube news occurs by exchanging the function of news as a source of information which is packaged non-formally so that it gives an entertaining impression in its broadcast. This is unusual in delivering news on television. News programs are usually delivered formally with a news anchor in them. However, Youtube KompasTV is able to package the news that will be delivered in a different packaging. Unfortunately, the

news displayed often only consists of information from sources whose validity is unknown or whose sources are taken from other news. Therefore, Youtube KompasTV in practice commodifies content in packaging news broadcasts. The practice of content commodification can be seen from the function of Youtube KompasTV as an information forum and a profit machine for the company. This can be seen from shows that always follow market needs.

Production as part of commodification forms an initial process where the desires of parties who influence media content such as the media owner's political background, the media owner's religious background, and even the media owner's ideological views meet the desires and interests of advertisers such as in audience segmentation. which is adjusted by consumer segmentation of the product to be advertised by looking at benchmarks in the form of ratings from the program. In this process, the selling value in the form of the number of viewers, age and even gender segmentation becomes the merchandise that the media industry sells to advertisers and then exchanges it into income for the media.

In the broadcast process, KompasTV YouTube also does not escape the process of commodification of workers. Commodification of labor means selling the energy and thoughts of media workers to create ideas that can be bought and sold. Creativity and theme ideas in news broadcasts on KompasTV YouTube are demands of workers to continue to give their best for the existence of the program. Starting from the production process which involves ideas and creativity in finding themes every day as well as carrying out the editing process which demands the skills of workers in the process so that it becomes a show that successfully attracts audiences to watch it faithfully.

Spatialization is the process of overcoming distance and time constraints in distributing merchandise in social life. In political economic practice, spatialization plays a role as a disseminator of media products through mass media. With current technological advances, information dissemination has been carried out by almost all mass media industry activists. Such as dissemination through mass media, whether electronic, print or online, even now social media also really helps disseminate information. With the distribution process through mass media and social media, the production process for selling goods in the form of information continues without any barriers of distance and time.

KompasTV's existence on various social media such as YouTube is a form of defense of its existence. These supporting media also provide a continuation for viewers who have missed television broadcasts. As well as helping viewers to get information related to KompasTV as a multiplatform media where each program can be enjoyed in various ways. The placement of different positions is a manifestation of structuration steps. All of them are one unified system that cannot be separated. The aim is to keep the wheels of industry running which includes three processes, namely production, distribution and consumption. Structuration is placing employees structurally according to their position and abilities. The aim is to uniform the company's ideology and values for each individual.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Media workers are professional workers because they are required to have special skills in the field of journalism. The heavy work carried out by media workers and the minimal wages of media workers because they are not equivalent to a journalist's living wage mean that the practice of commodification continues. Media workers are generally not aware of the commodification practices that occur, because they consider them normal. The existence of Youtube KompasTV as a media effort to maintain its existence, so that the creativity of content creators determines the amount of benefits obtained, which in this case becomes the commodification of workers to provide profits for the media. Regarding the quality of news, this research found that content creators generally only pursue what is the public's consumption habits, so that the news broadcast is generally only done to meet normative quality standards.

This research confirms the assumptions and practices of political economic theory that are still strong in the media industry, which in this case prioritizes the commodification of

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workers by branding media workers as a prestigious profession. So that no matter how heavy the workload is given to workers, who in this research are KompasTV YouTube content creators, they will continue to work happily, even exceeding institutional expectations because they are considered prestigious and challenging.

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