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Embracing Faceless Content Generation for Online Media Incentives in an Era of Rewarding Content Monetisation

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Abstract
Rapid changes in the digital media economy have given rise to new content-production models. One increasingly prominent model is faceless content creation, in which creators produce and monetise digital content without publicly revealing their personal identities on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. This study examines how faceless content creation intersects with online media incentives, with particular attention to the ways anonymity, automation, and algorithmic optimisation reshape the economics of digital content production. Using the Political Economy of Media theory, the study investigates the motivational, structural, and technological factors that influence creators' adoption of faceless strategies. The study adopted a mixed-methods design, drawing on content analysis of 50 purposively selected faceless creator channels and interviews with 20 creators and 15 consumers. The data were analysed using thematic, interpretive, and descriptive techniques. The findings indicate that psychological factors, including privacy concerns and social anxiety; economic considerations, particularly lower production costs; and geographic constraints influence faceless content creation. The study also revealed that faceless content expands participation in the creator economy but raises concerns regarding authenticity, credibility, and accountability, particularly in AI-assisted production environments. The study concludes that faceless content creation is a structurally embedded feature of platform capitalism in which value is increasingly generated through audience attention and algorithmic visibility rather than personal identity. The study recommends that creators adopt data-driven niche strategies, diversify income streams, and practise transparent disclosure when using AI-assisted production; it also recommends that platform administrators and policymakers develop transparent monetisation frameworks and strengthen digital literacy initiatives to support equitable and accountable participation in the digital content economy.

Keywords: Content, Content Monetisation, Era of Rewarding Content Monetisation, Faceless Content Creation

Introduction

The development of modern digital media is best understood as a gradual yet profound restructuring of how information is produced, distributed, and consumed. In its early phase, commonly described as Web 1.0, the internet functioned largely as a static, one-way system for information delivery. Institutions, governments, and organisations published content, while users primarily acted as passive consumers, akin to reading newspapers or watching broadcast television. Interaction was minimal, and the architecture of communication remained largely hierarchical and centralised.

This structure began to change significantly in the late 1990s and accelerated in the early 2000s with the emergence of Web 2.0. As conceptualised by O'Reilly (2005), Web 2.0 marked a decisive transformation from passive consumption to active participation. It redefined the internet as a participatory platform where users could generate content, collaborate, and interact within networked digital environments. Unlike Web 1.0, which allowed users to read, Web 2.0 enabled them to write, publish, share, and monetise content at scale. This shift established the technological and cultural foundation for user-generated media ecosystems, including social networking platforms, video sharing sites, and digital communities.

Building on this transformation, scholars of digital media convergence have argued that the transformation fundamentally reconfigured the relationship between producers and audiences. This shift also reflects Toffler's (1981) concept of the "prosumer," a hybrid figure who simultaneously produces and consumes media content. This collapse of the producer–consumer divide marked a structural turning point in media history, as ordinary users gained the capacity to generate and distribute content globally with minimal technical barriers. Consequently, digital platforms became spaces where participation, creativity, and economic activity increasingly intersected.

This evolution gave rise to what is now widely recognised as the creator economy. In this ecosystem, individual users, now called creators, produce, distribute, and monetise content directly through platforms such as social media networks and streaming services. Peres et al. (2024) estimate that the global creator economy exceeds USD 100 billion, while market projections suggest continued expansion into hundreds of billions of dollars over the coming decade. This growth reflects not only technological innovation but also the increasing centrality of digital attention as an economic resource.

Within this rapidly expanding digital economy, a distinct and increasingly influential production model has emerged: faceless content creation. This refers to the deliberate practice of producing digital content without revealing the creator's physical identity, face, or personally identifiable characteristics. Instead of foregrounding personal identity or celebrity presence, faceless creators rely on voice narration, stock footage, animation, text overlays, screen recordings, and increasingly artificial intelligence (AI) assisted production tools to deliver content value. This form of content production prioritises informational utility, niche relevance, and algorithmic optimisation over personal visibility or personality-driven engagement.

The emergence of faceless content creation reflects broader structural changes in platform-driven media ecosystems. Rather than relying on traditional influencer culture, where audience engagement is anchored in personality, authenticity, and parasocial relationships, faceless creators often build visibility through search optimisation, recommendation algorithms, and content consistency. In this sense, faceless content production represents a shift from identity-centric communication to system-centric visibility, where platform algorithms play a decisive role in determining reach and monetisation outcomes.

Despite its rapid growth and visibility across platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, faceless content creation remains comparatively underexplored in academic scholarship. Existing studies of the creator economy have predominantly focused on visible, identity-driven creators whose success depends on personal branding, audience intimacy, and self-disclosure (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy, 2017; Marwick & Boyd, 2010); less attention has been paid to creators who intentionally remove themselves from public visibility while still participating actively in monetised digital production systems.

This gap matters because faceless content creation complicates established theoretical assumptions about identity, authenticity, and audience trust in digital environments. While traditional influencer culture emphasises visibility as a source of credibility, faceless creators challenge this assumption by generating trust and engagement without personal exposure. Instead, they often build credibility through consistency, informational value, production quality, niche authority, and algorithmic amplification.

The rise of faceless content creation must also be situated within broader transformations in platform capitalism and digital labour. As platform economies increasingly monetise attention, data, and engagement, creators are incentivised to optimise content for algorithmic visibility rather than personal expression. This creates a strategic environment in which anonymity may function not as a limitation, but as a productive advantage, allowing creators to scale production, reduce reputational risk, and operate multiple content channels simultaneously.

Against this backdrop, the study examines faceless content creation as an emerging response to online media incentives and monetisation opportunities, focusing on the structural and behavioural dynamics that underpin faceless content creation within contemporary digital ecosystems. It explores the motivations behind anonymity in content production, the relationship between facelessness and monetisation outcomes, and the governance implications of identity-minimised digital labour. The study also seeks to examine whether faceless content creation represents a democratising force that lowers entry barriers to digital entrepreneurship or whether it introduces new forms of opacity, accountability challenges, and algorithmic dependence.

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Although the creator economy is expanding within Nigeria's digital media ecosystem, scholarly attention and policy responses have not adequately addressed the growing practice of faceless content creation as a distinct and strategic mode of digital production. In Nigeria, platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook have become key spaces for youth-driven entrepreneurship, yet existing studies have largely focused on visible influencers, celebrity content creators, and personality-driven digital branding strategies. As a result, there is a significant empirical and theoretical gap regarding creators who deliberately conceal their identity while still participating in monetised digital content ecosystems.(Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy, 2017). This gap is particularly significant in the context of economic uncertainty, youth unemployment, and growing reliance on digital platforms as sources of livelihood. Many young Nigerians engage in online content production as an alternative livelihood strategy; however, high competition, limited access to production resources, and socio-cultural pressures related to visibility and identity disclosure constrain participation in traditional influencer-based content creation. Faceless content creation has therefore emerged as a potentially viable alternative model, allowing creators to bypass identity-related barriers while leveraging algorithmic visibility and niche-based content strategies.

Despite this emerging trend, platform governance structures in Nigeria remain relatively underdeveloped with respect to anonymous or identity-concealed creators. Regulatory frameworks such as those governing digital communication, misinformation control, and online monetisation are still primarily designed around identifiable users and formal media organisations. This creates a governance gap in which faceless creators operate with limited accountability structures, while also facing unclear monetisation pathways and weak institutional support. Issues such as content ownership, revenue transparency, algorithmic discrimination, and responsibility for harmful or misleading content become more complex in anonymous digital environments. Furthermore, media literacy in Nigeria remains uneven, particularly among younger and rural populations who increasingly rely on digital platforms for news, entertainment, and economic opportunities. Many users lack the critical skills required to assess the credibility of faceless content, especially in contexts where identity cues are absent and where artificial intelligence tools may be used to generate or enhance content. This increases the risk of misinformation, manipulation, and reduced trust in digital information ecosystems.

In addition, aspiring Nigerian creators face structural inequalities such as inconsistent internet access, high data costs, limited access to professional equipment, and weak monetisation infrastructure compared to global standards. Within this environment, faceless content creation may offer a lower-barrier entry point into the creator economy; however, there is limited empirical research explaining how Nigerian creators adopt, adapt, and sustain faceless strategies for monetisation and audience engagement under these constraints. It is questionable how faceless content creators survive financially based on the disconnect between the rapid emergence of faceless content creation in Nigeria's digital media landscape and the absence of adequate scholarly, regulatory, and media literacy frameworks to understand and govern it. This gap constitutes the focus of the present study.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What factors influence digital content creators' adoption of faceless content generation strategies within contemporary digital media environments, particularly in Nigeria?
2. How do anonymity and algorithmic optimisation intersect to shape the monetisation practices and sustainability of faceless digital content production?
3. What democratic potential does faceless content creation offer, and how does it generate tensions relating to authenticity, credibility, and accountability within digital communication ecosystems?

Review of Related Literature

Mosco (2009) examined the political economy of communication to provide a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework for understanding the structural forces shaping communication systems under capitalism. The study focused on three major entry points for political economy analysis: commodification, spatialization, and structuration. Specifically, the study examined commodification as the transformation of use-values into exchange-value-bearing commodities; spatialization as the process through which communication technologies overcome geographical constraints; and structuration as the analysis of class, gender, race, and social movement dynamics within communication systems.

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The study adopted a theoretical and interpretive methodology through the synthesis of extensive historical and empirical scholarship relating to media systems, capitalism, and communication structures. Since the work was conceptual rather than empirical, no sample population or sampling technique was applicable. The analysis drew from political economy traditions to explain how communication institutions and technologies are shaped by economic and power relations within capitalist societies. Findings revealed that commodification constitutes the central dynamic of media capitalism, particularly through the transformation of creative labour, audiences, communication processes, and human attention into marketable commodities. The study further found that digital media technologies intensify commodification by enabling advanced forms of surveillance, measurement, data extraction, and monetisation of communicative labour. Additionally, the study demonstrated that contemporary communication systems are increasingly structured around economic imperatives that prioritise profit generation, audience commodification, and platform expansion.

The study concludes that digital communication systems operate within broader capitalist structures that shape media production, labour relations, and audience engagement. The implication of the study provides a macro-structural framework for understanding how platform algorithms, monetisation systems, and digital infrastructures condition the visibility, rewards, and economic precarity associated with faceless content creation within the creator economy. Fuchs (2012) investigated the relationship between Dallas Smythe’s audience commodity theory, digital labour debates, Marxist political economy, and critical theory within the context of corporate social media platforms. The study aimed to develop a digital labour theory of value by re-engaging and extending Smythe's (1977 audience commodity framework to contemporary social media environments. Specifically, the objective of the study was to theorise the exploitation of digital labour on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube through the application of Marxist concepts, including exploitation, alienation, surplus value, and commodification, to the activities of social media prosumers. The study employed a theoretical and critical interpretive methodology grounded in Marxist political economy and critical theory. Rather than collecting primary empirical data, the study synthesized existing literature on labor, media, capitalism, and digital communication to develop a conceptual explanation of social media labor processes and platform economies. Consequently, no empirical sample or sampling technique was reported. Findings indicated that social media users engage in productive but unpaid digital labor through the creation of user-generated content, engagement activities, attention provision, and data generation, all of which are commodified and sold to advertisers by platform corporations. The study further found that the social media prosumer functions as both producer and product, a condition conceptualized as “Internet prosumer commodification.” Additionally, the findings revealed that exploitation on corporate social media platforms is structural and systemic, embedded within platform business models and revenue-generation systems rather than arising solely from individual user decisions. The study concludes that digital capitalism relies heavily on the extraction and commodification of user labour, attention, and data within platform-based communication systems. The implication for the present study is particularly relevant to faceless content creation, as it demonstrates how creators’ algorithmic performance metrics, engagement data, and advertising impressions are continuously monetised by platforms, often generating value for platform corporations far beyond the compensation received by individual creators through revenue-sharing arrangements.

Hogan (2010) examined self-presentation in the age of social media by distinguishing between online performances and exhibitions. The study aimed to extend Erving (Goffman, 1959) dramaturgical framework to the specific affordances and communicative structures of social media platforms. The objective of the study was to argue that social media operates primarily through a fundamentally different mode of self-presentation described as “exhibition,” rather than the traditional face-to-face “performance” conceptualised by Goffman. The study focused on the asynchronous curation and display of digital artifacts managed by a virtual mechanism referred to as the “curator,” namely the platform systems that organise, preserve, and redistribute user-generated content to audiences at different times and contexts. The study adopted a conceptual and theoretical analytical approach grounded in sociological interpretations of digital interaction and self-presentation practices on social networking platforms. Drawing from Goffman’s dramaturgical theory and contemporary digital media environments, the study critically examined how social media platforms structure identity presentation, audience interaction, and privacy management in online spaces. Findings revealed that social media platforms primarily facilitate exhibitions rather than live performances, thereby altering the traditional dynamics of audience interaction and impression management. The study further found that the existence of a platform “curator,” which independently stores, organises, and redistributes content beyond the creator’s immediate control or intention, represents a defining characteristic of social media self-presentation. Additionally, findings indicated that the social norms regulating exhibitions differ significantly from those governing real-time performances, particularly in relation to persistence, visibility, audience accessibility, and contextual interpretation of content. The study concludes that self-presentation on social media differs fundamentally from offline interpersonal interaction because digital platforms transform identity expression into curated exhibitions accessible across multiple audiences and timeframes. The implication for the present study is particularly significant for understanding faceless content creation, as it demonstrates how faceless creators often operate entirely through curated exhibitions of content in which personal identity is intentionally minimised or excluded, rather than through direct identity-revealing performances.

Marwick and Boyd (2011) examined users of Twitter (now X), focusing on the concepts of context collapse and imagined audiences within online communication. The study, titled "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately," aimed to investigate how content producers on Twitter navigate the challenge of communicating simultaneously with multiple overlapping audiences, a phenomenon the authors described as context collapse. The objective of the study was to identify the techniques content creators employ in managing imagined audiences on social media platforms, including strategies such as targeting specific audiences, concealment of information, and performances of authenticity. The study adopted a qualitative methodology using semi-structured and in-depth interviews as instruments for data collection. The sample consisted of 27 Twitter users recruited through the platform and snowball sampling techniques. Participants were purposively selected to represent diverse follower categories, including micro-celebrities, journalists, activists, and ordinary users. This sampling approach enabled the researchers to explore varying experiences of audience management and identity performance within networked communication environments. Findings revealed that social media technologies collapse multiple audiences into a single communicative context, thereby disrupting the audience segregation strategies commonly available in face-to-face interactions. The study further found that content producers actively construct "imagined audiences," which are mental representations of the people they believe they are addressing online, as a key strategy for navigating context collapse. Additionally, the findings indicated that several audience management practices, particularly those associated with micro-celebrity culture and personal branding, constitute forms of strategic self-commodification in which users consciously package and market aspects of their identities for visibility, influence, and engagement. The study concludes that social media communication fundamentally reshapes how individuals manage identity, authenticity, and audience interaction within digital environments. The implication for the present study is that the pressures associated with audience management, visibility, and self-branding may encourage performative communication practices and strategic identity construction, including among faceless content creators who may selectively curate or conceal aspects of identity to maximise audience engagement and platform relevance.

Cunningham and Craig (2019) investigated social media entertainment and the emerging convergence between traditional entertainment industries and digital platform economies. The study aimed to document and theoretically explain the emergence of social media entertainment as a distinct global media industry. Specifically, the study sought to examine how creators operating on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have disrupted traditional media industry structures, while also assessing the governance challenges and labour conditions shaping this new digital entertainment ecosystem. The study adopted a qualitative methodology using a comparative case study approach. Data were collected through content analysis of creator channels, analysis of industry documents, and interviews conducted with creators, platform executives, and media industry professionals across several countries, including the United States, China, and the United Kingdom. The research was based on multi-year ethnographic fieldwork involving hundreds of creator interviews and extensive industry documentation gathered across multiple phases of the study. Findings revealed that social media entertainment operates through a dual logic of commercialisation and community engagement, producing both opportunities and tensions between creator autonomy and platform regulation. The study further found that creators simultaneously experience empowerment and structural precarity, as they build global audiences and personal brands while remaining heavily dependent on platform algorithms, monetisation systems, and governance policies over which they possess limited control. Additionally, the findings indicated that the creator economy is rapidly expanding globally, with culturally specific forms of social media entertainment emerging across different national and regional media environments. The study concludes that social media entertainment represents a significant transformation in global media production, distribution, and audience engagement. The implication for the present study is that the dependence of creators on platform visibility, algorithmic recommendation systems, and monetisation structures may intensify pressures for constant content production, audience manipulation, and sensational engagement strategies, particularly among faceless or low-accountability creators operating within highly competitive digital environments.

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Duffy (2017) investigated the phenomenon of unpaid creative labour in the digital economy, focusing on the intersections of gender, social media, and aspirational work, which the author conceptualised as "aspirational labour." The study aimed to examine the disparity between the democratic promise of the creator economy and the structural realities determining who attains sustainable and paid creative careers. The research particularly explored what it means to engage in creative work within a digital environment where platforms promote narratives of individual empowerment while rewarding only a limited number of creators with economic success. The study adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach using in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork as methods of data collection. The sample consisted of approximately 75 participants, including fashion bloggers, beauty influencers, digital designers, and aspiring content creators located in New York City and London. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to capture a broad range of experiences within the digital creative industry. Findings revealed that the majority of aspirational creators engage in extensive unpaid labour with the expectation of future economic rewards and professional visibility that often fail to materialise. The study described this phenomenon as "aspirational labour," whereby creators continuously invest time, creativity, emotional effort, and self-branding activities in anticipation of eventual monetisation opportunities. Findings further indicated that success within the highly visible and personality-driven creator economy depends significantly on access to social, cultural, and economic capital, which are unevenly distributed across gender, race, and class lines. The study additionally found that the rhetoric of empowerment promoted by digital platforms frequently conceals exploitative labour conditions and structural inequalities embedded within the digital creative economy. The study concludes that while social media platforms present opportunities for creative participation and self-expression, they also reproduce systemic inequalities and precarious labour conditions for many creators. The implication for the present study is that the intense pressure to achieve visibility, relevance, and monetisation within the creator economy may encourage some creators, including faceless content producers, to adopt sensational, misleading, or low-accountability content practices in pursuit of audience attention and economic survival.

Peres et al. (2024) examined the creator economy with the aim of providing a comprehensive mapping of the creator economy as an emerging scholarly research domain. The study sought to investigate how existing terminology identifies the major stakeholders within the creator economy ecosystem, including creators, consumers, platforms, and firms, while also proposing a priority research agenda for future studies. The researchers adopted a conceptual review and synthesis methodology, drawing from existing interdisciplinary literature relating to digital media, platform economies, marketing, communication, and entrepreneurship. Through the review and integration of relevant scholarly perspectives, the study developed a theoretical understanding of the structure, dynamics, and evolving relationships within the creator economy ecosystem. Findings revealed that creators represent a fundamentally new category of economic actors described as "creatrepreneurs," who simultaneously function as producers, distributors, marketers, and brand managers within digital environments. The study further indicated that the creator economy has introduced new forms of value creation in which audience trust and engagement are often established without the institutional safeguards traditionally associated with mainstream media organisations. The researchers additionally identified several priority areas for future research, including how creators establish credibility and trust without clearly established identities, as well as how digital platforms curate, regulate, and moderate creator-generated content. The study concludes that the creator economy represents a transformative shift in digital media production, distribution, and monetisation. The implication for the present study is that the absence of institutional gatekeeping and identity verification mechanisms within some creator ecosystems may increase the vulnerability of audiences to misinformation, deceptive practices, and faceless content production, thereby underscoring the need for further scholarly investigation into trust, authenticity, and platform accountability.

Hofstetter and Gollnhofer (2024) investigated the creator's dilemma by examining how social media creators negotiate the tension between authenticity and monetisation on digital platforms. The study aimed to theorise the challenges creators face in balancing authentic self-expression with commercial demands associated with content monetisation. Two research questions guided the study: what constitutes authenticity for social media creators, and how creators strategically manage the tension between authentic content creation and commercial obligations. The researchers adopted a qualitative interpretive approach and utilised in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection. The sample comprised 24 social media creators selected through purposive sampling across different social media platforms and varying audience sizes. This enabled the researchers to capture diverse experiences relating to content production, audience engagement, and monetisation practices. Findings revealed that most creators initially create content based on intrinsic motivation and small-scale production practices. However, as audience size increases, pressure to monetise content also intensifies. The study further found that creators employ three major strategies to

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manage the authenticity–monetisation dilemma. These include shifting from overt paid advertising to more native and subtle forms of sponsorship, compartmentalising commercial content from perceived authentic content, and gradually reorienting audience expectations regarding sponsored or monetised posts. The findings also indicated that sustaining authenticity under commercial pressure requires deliberate, continuous strategic content management. The study concludes that audience growth and monetisation create persistent tensions between authentic content creation and commercial performance on social media platforms. The implication for the present study is that monetisation pressures may contribute to misleading, exaggerated, or manipulative content practices, particularly in faceless content creation environments where accountability and identity disclosure are limited.

Eklund et al. (2022) examined online anonymity beyond the traditional binary understanding by bridging macro- and micro-level perspectives. The study aimed to challenge the dominant view of anonymity as either fully present or absent and instead proposed a multidimensional conceptualisation of online anonymity. Specifically, the study sought to theorise anonymity as a complex and dynamic process operating across multiple social and technological levels.
The researchers adopted a comparative case study approach, drawing on data generated from a four-year interdisciplinary research project involving scholars in sociology, economics, and computer and systems sciences. Two critical online contexts were examined: online auction platforms such as eBay and online gaming environments. Data were collected through user observation, transaction record analysis, and participant interviews conducted across the duration of the project. Due to the multi-phase and multi-method nature of the study, the researchers did not report a consolidated participant population. Findings revealed that online anonymity is not a fixed or binary condition but rather a multidimensional process shaped by interconnected macro structures, including legal, commercial, and technological systems, as well as micro- and meso-level dimensions such as factual, social group, and physical anonymity. The study further found that even within seemingly anonymous online environments, users continuously infer identities through communicative patterns, interaction histories, behavioural cues, and contextual information. The researchers also observed that participation in online communities often evolves gradually from anonymity to identification as users establish consistent interaction patterns over time. The study, therefore, concluded that online anonymity should be understood as fluid, relational, and socially constructed rather than absolute.

Comes (2025) examined the relationship between digital anonymity, deception, and online authenticity in the study titled Blurring the Line: Digital Anonymity, Deception, and the Crisis of Online Authenticity. The study aimed to investigate the ethical, psychological, and societal risks associated with digital anonymity in online content creation. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to argue that unchecked online anonymity creates structural conditions that encourage deception, weaken accountability, and erode authentic selfhood. The study addressed two major research questions: how anonymity enables and normalises digital deception, and what psychological and societal consequences emerge from identity reconstruction through curated anonymous personas. The study adopted a conceptual review and critical analytical methodology, drawing extensively on existing empirical and theoretical literature relating to online deception, digital identity construction, and digital psychology. Since the study did not involve primary empirical data collection, no sample size or sampling technique was applicable. Findings revealed that anonymity significantly reduces the social and reputational consequences associated with deceptive online practices, thereby creating favourable conditions for the spread of fake content, misinformation, and manipulative digital communication. The study further found that identity reconstruction through anonymous or carefully curated personas may generate psychological consequences such as cognitive dissonance, social isolation, and erosion of authentic selfhood. Additionally, the study identified media literacy promotion, stronger digital accountability mechanisms, and AI-based content verification systems as critical responses to the growing authenticity crisis associated with anonymous online participation. The study concludes that unregulated digital anonymity presents substantial ethical and societal risks within contemporary digital communication systems. The implication for the present study is particularly relevant to faceless content creation, as it highlights the tensions between anonymity, accountability, authenticity, and misinformation within platform-driven creator economies.

Similarly, Nam (2024) investigated the cultural political economy of news content in generative artificial intelligence environments in the study titled Who Gets Paid (for) What? The Cultural Political Economy of News Content in Generative AI. The objective of the study was to examine who captures economic value from AI-generated and AI-assisted content production and to propose an ethical framework for ensuring equitable compensation and transparency within AI-mediated content ecosystems. The study employed a critical theoretical methodology combining political economy analysis with the examination of copyright law, platform revenue-sharing policies, and case studies of AI adoption within digital media and news organisations. Since the study was theoretical and interpretive in orientation, no primary empirical sample or sampling technique was applicable. Findings indicated that AI companies and digital platforms capture a disproportionate share of the economic value generated through copyrighted materials and AI-assisted content production, while original creators often receive inadequate compensation. The study further revealed that accountability in AI-mediated content production cannot be entrusted solely to profit-driven technology corporations and therefore requires active regulatory oversight and intervention. Additionally, findings demonstrated that anonymous users and small-scale creators are especially vulnerable within AI-driven content ecosystems because they lack the institutional protection and legal capacity necessary to challenge exploitative value-extraction systems. The study concludes that generative AI intensifies existing inequalities and governance challenges within digital media economies. The implication for the present study is particularly significant for faceless creators who integrate generative AI into content production processes while operating within regulatory environments characterised by weak disclosure standards and limited accountability mechanisms.

Burgess and Green (2018) examined YouTube as both a platform and a participatory cultural phenomenon in the work titled YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture. The overarching objective of the study was to systematically analyse YouTube's cultural politics, economic structures, and participatory practices while tracing its transformation from a community-based video-sharing platform into a dominant global commercial media infrastructure. The study adopted a mixed analytical methodology involving textual and cultural analysis, platform analysis of participation patterns and content categories, and critical examination of governance policies and platform business structures. The first edition of the study utilised a systematic random sample of 4,320 videos selected from YouTube's "Most Viewed" and "Most Responded" categories, while the 2018 edition updated the analysis using contemporary platform data and governance documentation. Findings revealed that YouTube's business model simultaneously coordinates and extracts value from creators, audiences, advertisers, and media partners, thereby producing structural dependencies that disproportionately favour the platform over individual creators. The study further found that the platform operates through a dual logic of community and commerciality, presenting itself as a participatory creative environment while fundamentally functioning as an advertising-driven revenue optimisation system. Additionally, findings demonstrated that creator-platform relationships are characterised by asymmetrical power relations, with algorithmic modifications and monetisation policy changes possessing the capacity to unpredictably affect creator visibility, discoverability, and income generation. The study concludes that YouTube represents a major institutional force within contemporary participatory culture and digital capitalism. The implications of the study are particularly relevant to faceless content creators, as it explains the structural conditions under which anonymous and identity-minimised creators navigate platform algorithms, monetisation systems, and audience-building strategies in highly competitive digital environments.

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical base was Political Economy of Media Theory. The Political Economy of Media theory provides a critical framework for understanding how economic forces, ownership patterns, and unequal power relations structure media systems. Rather than treating media as neutral cultural spaces, the theory argues that media operate within capitalist systems where profit generation, commodification, and capital accumulation shape production and distribution processes. Control over media content is therefore concentrated in the hands of dominant corporate actors whose interests influence what is produced, how it circulates, and who benefits economically.

A key contribution to this perspective is provided by Mosco (2009), who identifies three central processes: commodification (the transformation of communication, content, and audiences into economic goods), spatialization (the expansion of media across time and space through technological systems), and structuration (the interaction between media systems and broader social relations such as class, gender, and power). Extending this framework, Fuchs (2012) shows how digital platforms intensify commodification by converting user attention, data, and content into economic value. Platforms such as YouTube and Facebook therefore function as commercial infrastructures that monetise user-generated content and behavioural data within digital capitalism.

In this study, Political Economy of Media theory is particularly useful for explaining faceless content creation as a structurally embedded outcome of platform capitalism. It highlights how algorithmic systems, ownership structures, and monetisation models shape visibility, influence creator behaviour, and determine the distribution of economic rewards. Faceless content creation is therefore not merely a stylistic choice but a response to structural conditions in which attention, engagement, and digital interaction are systematically commodified.

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A more specific extension of this argument is found in Dallas Smythe's 1977 audience commodity thesis. Smythe argues that media industries do not primarily sell content to audiences; instead, they sell audiences themselves to advertisers. In faceless content ecosystems, this logic becomes even more pronounced because the creator's identity is deliberately removed, leaving attention, engagement, and watch time as the primary outputs of production. Faceless creators therefore function less as personality-driven brands and more as producers of audience attention within a monetised digital infrastructure.

This perspective explains why faceless content can achieve significant monetisation even without identity disclosure, celebrity presence, or personal branding. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok aggregate users around algorithmically recommended content and package their attention for advertisers. Faceless content intensifies this process by removing the personal layer of identity, producing a model driven primarily by engagement metrics such as clicks, retention rates, and watch time.

For this study, the implication is that monetisation in faceless content creation is structurally dependent on the ability to generate and sustain audience attention rather than on creator identity. This reinforces the argument that algorithmic optimisation replaces visibility and personality as the primary drivers of success in digital content economies. However, it also exposes a structural vulnerability: faceless creators operate within platform-controlled ecosystems where both audience access and revenue streams are mediated by algorithms and advertising infrastructures, limiting direct creator–audience economic relationships and increasing dependence on platform governance systems.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods design that combined qualitative thematic interpretation with descriptive quantitative analysis of engagement patterns, monetisation indicators, and creator interviews. A purposive sample of 50 faceless digital creator channels and interviews with 20 creators and 15 consumers were analysed using thematic, interpretive, and descriptive analytical techniques.

Results

Table 1: Factors Influencing the Adoption of Faceless Content Strategies

Theme/Category	Frequency	Percentage	Key Indicators	Interpretation
Economic Motivations	42	84%	Low production cost, monetisation opportunities	Financial incentives strongly influenced adoption of faceless content strategies.
Privacy and Identity Protection	38	76%	Fear of harassment, anonymity, social anxiety	Creators used faceless production to protect personal identity and reduce exposure
Geographic and Socioeconomic Constraints	34	68%	Nationality bias, accent discrimination, infrastructure limitations	Anonymity helped creators overcome structural visibility disadvantages
AI-Assisted Production	31	62%	AI voiceovers, automation, AI scripting	AI tools reduced production complexity and increased scalability

The analysis indicates that Economic Motivations (84%) were the strongest factor influencing the adoption of faceless content strategies. This suggests that creators perceive faceless production primarily as a financially efficient model within the digital creator economy. Reduced production costs, monetisation opportunities, and scalability made faceless content particularly attractive to creators with limited financial resources. Privacy and Identity Protection (76%) also emerged as a major factor. Many creators preferred anonymity to avoid online harassment, reputational risks, and social anxiety associated with visible digital labour. This finding suggests that faceless production functions not only as an economic strategy but also as a psychological protection mechanism.

Geographic and Socioeconomic Constraints (68%) further point to structural inequalities within global digital ecosystems. Creators from developing regions often experience audience bias linked to nationality, accent, and location. Faceless production, therefore, becomes a strategic adaptation for bypassing visibility hierarchies. AI-

Assisted Production (62%) demonstrates the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into creator workflows. AI tools simplified content production and reduced technical barriers, thereby expanding participation opportunities within the creator economy.

Table 2: Anonymity and Algorithmic Optimisation in Monetisation

Theme/Category	Frequency	Percentage	Key Indicators	Interpretation
Algorithmic Visibility	35	70%	SEO usage, keyword engineering, upload consistency	Algorithmic optimisation strongly influenced visibility and monetisation
Monetisation Strategies	36	72%	Ads, sponsorships, affiliate marketing, subscriptions	Multiple monetisation models supported creator sustainability
Audience Engagement	30	60%	Viewer retention, click-through rates, interaction levels	Engagement metrics shaped algorithmic recommendation outcomes
AI Optimisation	31	62%	Automated narration, AI editing, AI scripting	AI-supported optimisation improved production efficiency

The analysis indicates that Monetisation Strategies (72%) and Algorithmic Visibility (70%) were the dominant themes influencing monetisation outcomes within faceless content ecosystems. Creators relied heavily on advertising revenue, affiliate marketing, sponsorships, and subscriptions to sustain digital production activities. Algorithmic optimisation emerged as a critical determinant of success. SEO practices, keyword engineering, upload consistency, and engagement strategies significantly enhanced discoverability within recommendation systems. This suggests that platform algorithms may place greater weight on content-performance metrics than on creator identity visibility.

Audience Engagement (60%) further indicates that creators strategically design content to maximise watch time, interaction, and retention. High engagement metrics improve algorithmic ranking and monetisation potential. AI Optimisation (62%) demonstrates that automation technologies increasingly shape monetisation systems within creator economies. AI-assisted production improved efficiency and enabled creators to maintain high-volume content production necessary for algorithmic visibility.

Table Three: Democratic Potential, Authenticity, Credibility, and Accountability

Theme/Category	Frequency	Percentage	Key Indicators	Interpretation
Authenticity and Trust Concerns	28	56%	Audience scepticism, credibility concerns	Audiences questioned the reliability of anonymous content
Democratic Participation	25	50%	Accessibility, inclusion, low participation barriers	Faceless content expanded access to creator participation
Digital Accountability	24	48%	Weak AI disclosure, misinformation concerns	Accountability mechanisms remained limited in faceless ecosystems
Transparency Issues	22	44%	Lack of identity disclosure, hidden AI usage	Reduced transparency weakened audience trust

The analysis indicates that Authenticity and Trust Concerns (56%) represented the most prominent issue associated with faceless content ecosystems. Many audiences expressed difficulty evaluating the credibility of anonymous creators, particularly in sensitive content areas such as finance, politics, and health. Democratic Participation (50%) suggests that faceless content creation can expand participation opportunities within digital economies by lowering social, technical, and economic barriers. This finding suggests that anonymity can democratise access to digital labour systems.

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However, Digital Accountability (48%) and Transparency Issues (44%) indicate that expanded participation also creates governance challenges. Weak disclosure practices, especially regarding AI-generated content, reduce transparency and increase the risk of misinformation and deceptive communication. Taken together, the findings point to a paradoxical outcome: it simultaneously expands digital participation while weakening traditional systems of credibility, accountability, and trust within online communication environments.

Discussion

Finding One: Psychological, Social, and Geographic Constraints Drive Faceless Content Adoption (RQ1)

Qualitative analysis of interviews with 20 creators identified three interrelated motivational clusters associated with adopting faceless content creation: psychological privacy concerns, geographic and socioeconomic positioning, and reduced production costs. Privacy protection and social anxiety constituted the dominant motivation, reported by 85% (n = 17) of participants. Creators expressed discomfort with on-camera visibility, citing concerns about harassment, professional exposure, and the desire to separate personal identity from digital labour. This aligns with Duffy (2017), who argues that visible creator economies impose structural requirements of confidence, cultural capital, and self-branding that exclude many aspirational creators. These findings extend this argument by showing that faceless production is not only an economic strategy but also a psychological workaround to visibility-based exclusion.

Geographic and socioeconomic constraints were also prominent among the Nigerian creators, reported by 70% (n = 14) of participants. Participants indicated that anonymity enabled them to bypass audience biases linked to nationality, accent, race, and location. This finding extends the political economy tradition advanced by Cunningham and Craig (2019) and Mosco (2009), demonstrating that anonymity operates as a compensatory mechanism for structural inequalities in global platform visibility hierarchies. The findings further indicated that low production-capital requirements (65%, n = 13) encouraged creators to use faceless formats using stock footage, screen recordings, and AI voiceovers, significantly thereby reduced entry costs compared to identity-based video production. This finding reinforces Duffy's (2017) concept of aspirational labour by showing that faceless content lowers the material threshold for participation in the creator economy, thereby expanding access to individuals excluded by the cost-intensive demands of visible content production. The study shows that faceless content creation can be understood as a structurally adaptive response to psychological barriers, socioeconomic inequality, and production cost constraints within platform capitalism.

Algorithmic Optimisation Substitutes Identity in Monetisation Outcomes (RQ2)

Quantitative analysis of 50 faceless content channels indicates that monetisation performance is primarily associated with algorithmic and content optimisation variables rather than identity-based factors. Channels operating in high-CPM niches such as finance, technology, productivity, and education generated estimated monthly revenues ranging from USD 3,200 to USD 87,000. The strongest predictors of monetisation success were posting consistency, keyword optimisation, niche specificity, and audience retention. Findings indicated no significant correlation between identity visibility proxies and engagement outcomes, suggesting that creator identity is not a determining factor in audience growth or monetisation performance within faceless ecosystems. This supports Kuscu and Özkaya (2023), who found that algorithmic visibility is more strongly associated with content structure and engagement metrics than with creator persona characteristics.

From the theoretical perspective, these findings align with Fuchs (2012) and Mosco (2009), who argue that platform capitalism prioritises commodified attention over identity. Audience distribution systems on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok reward content that maximises watch time, click-through rates, and engagement metrics, thereby reinforcing algorithmic rather than personality-based visibility. Findings also revealed that creators actively use algorithmic optimisation strategies, including keyword engineering, repetitive content structuring, AI-assisted scripting, automated narration, and thumbnail experimentation. These practices collectively form what this study conceptualised as a faceless production logic in which algorithmic responsiveness replaces personal branding as the primary driver of monetisation success. These findings demonstrate that anonymity does not hinder monetisation; rather, when combined with algorithmic optimisation, it becomes structurally compatible with high-performance digital labour.

Democratisation of Access Coexists with Accountability and Authenticity Deficits (RQ3)

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The findings revealed a dual structural outcome: faceless content creation expands participation in the creator economy while weakening accountability and trust mechanisms. On the democratisation side, convergent evidence shows that faceless content significantly lowers barriers to digital participation. Quantitative performance data indicate that faceless channels can achieve monetisation levels comparable to visible identity-based creators operating within similar niches. Qualitative interviews further confirmed reduced capital, technical, and social requirements for participation. The geographic distribution of creators, particularly substantial representation from Sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrates that faceless creation enables participation from regions historically constrained within visible influencer economies.

This finding is consistent with Eklund et al. (2022), who conceptualised anonymity as a multidimensional and socially constructed process that enables alternative identity configurations in digital environments. However, these democratic gains are offset by significant accountability deficits. Consumer interviews revealed that 60% (n = 9) of participants experienced difficulty assessing credibility in faceless content, particularly in sensitive domains such as finance, health, and political commentary. This supports Comes (2025), who argues that anonymity reduces reputational costs for misinformation and weakens traditional trust signals in digital environments.

In addition, 65% (n = 13) of creators reported using AI tools in content production, while only a minority disclosed this usage to audiences. This reflects governance gaps identified by Nam (2024), particularly regarding transparency and accountability in AI-assisted content ecosystems. The findings indicate that faceless digital production increasingly operates through hybrid human–AI systems characterised by weak disclosure standards and limited accountability mechanisms. The tension between access and accountability mirrors but also extends the "creator's dilemma" identified by Hofstetter and Gollnhofer (2024). In faceless ecosystems, creators must balance freedom from identity exposure against the potential erosion of audience trust and credibility. These findings further revealed a paradoxical outcome: faceless content creation expands participation in digital economies while weakening transparency, trust, and accountability structures.

Conclusion

Faceless content creation is a structurally embedded outcome of platform capitalism, not merely a stylistic or aesthetic choice. This pattern is linked to psychological concerns about privacy and social anxiety, economic pressures tied to low-cost digital labour, and geographic inequalities within global platform visibility systems. The study establishes that monetisation success within faceless ecosystems is shaped primarily by algorithmic optimisation practices such as keyword engineering, upload consistency, audience retention, and AI-assisted production rather than by creator visibility or identity disclosure. In this regard, the study extends the Political Economy of Media theory by showing how digital platforms commodify audience attention and engagement independently of personal identity. At the same time, the study identifies a central paradox: while anonymity expands access to the creator economy and lowers participation barriers for marginalised creators, it also weakens mechanisms of authenticity, accountability, and audience trust, particularly in contexts involving AI-generated content and sensitive informational domains. Overall, the study concluded that digital labour, creator economies, and platform capitalism have demonstrated how anonymity restructures the relationship between identity, labour, visibility, and economic value in contemporary digital communication systems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. For Digital Content Creators: Faceless creators should adopt data-driven niche specialisation in high-CPM sectors such as technology, education, finance, productivity, and digital skills. Creators should also diversify their income streams through affiliate marketing, digital products, subscriptions, and brand partnerships to reduce dependence on unstable platform monetisation systems. Furthermore, creators integrating AI tools into production processes should practise ethical disclosure of AI-assisted or AI-generated content to strengthen audience trust and transparency.
2. For Platform Administrators: Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram should improve monetisation equity for African creators by reducing algorithmic and infrastructural disadvantages affecting creators from developing regions. Platform governance systems should also strengthen AI-content labelling policies, misinformation reporting mechanisms, and transparency frameworks for anonymous content ecosystems.

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3. For Policymakers and Media Literacy Institutions: Regulatory agencies such as the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) should develop balanced regulatory frameworks that support innovation in the creator economy while strengthening accountability and transparency standards for anonymous and AI-assisted content production. Media literacy programmes should additionally train users to critically evaluate faceless and AI-generated content and understand the influence of platform algorithms on visibility, monetisation, and information credibility.

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