

PLATFORM LABOR AND THE POLITICS OF ALGORITHMIC IN/VISIBILITY

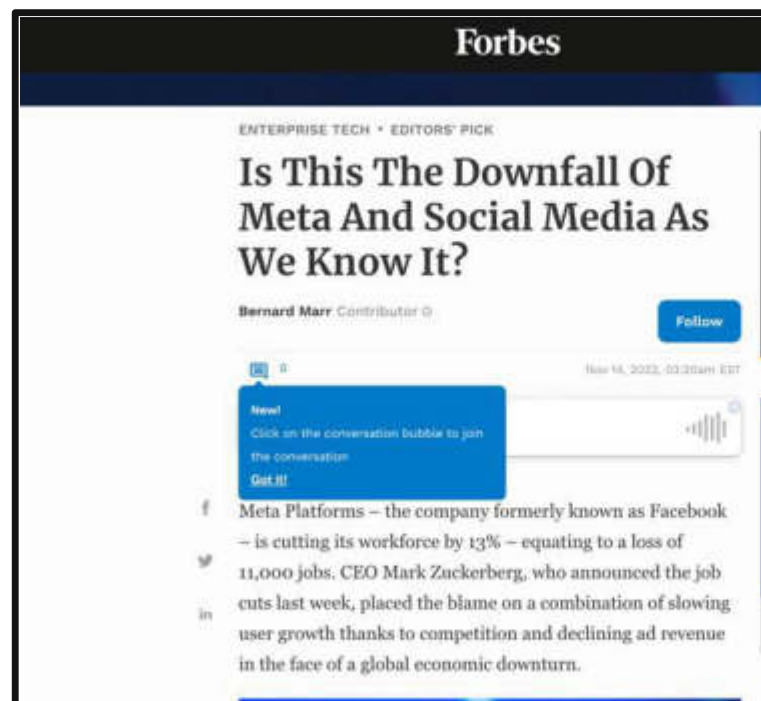
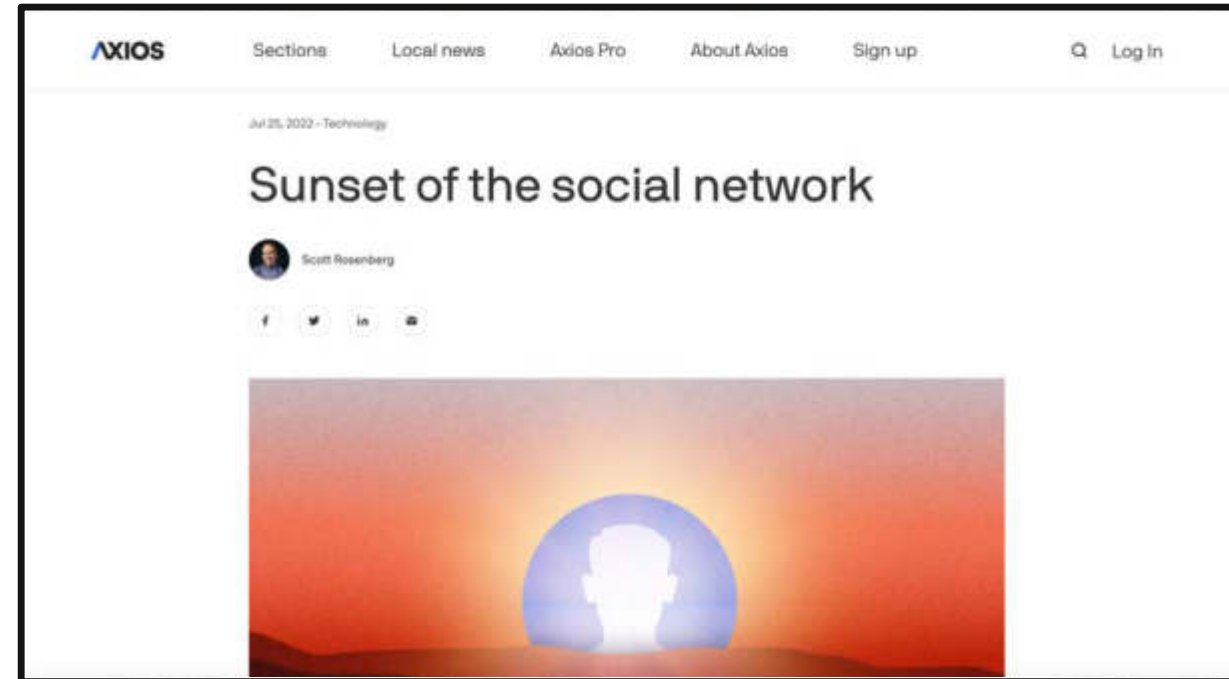
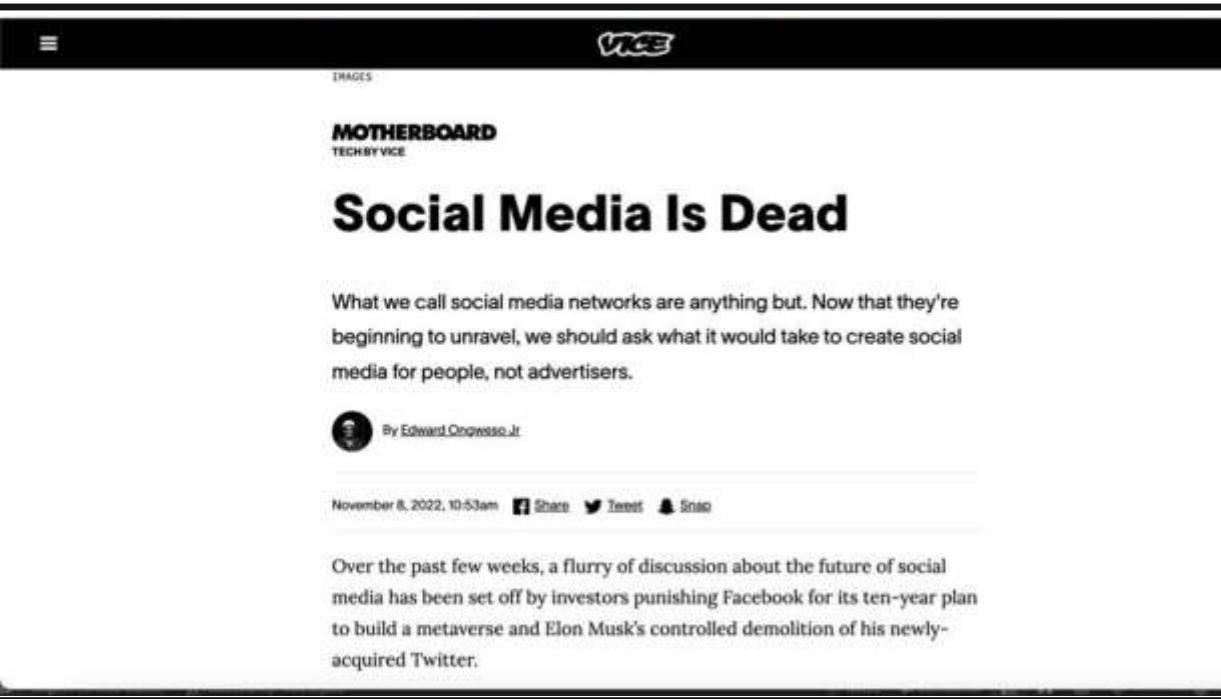
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**New Perspectives on the Digital Economy: Sharing, Platforms
& Regulation**



Img credit: Pexels





Tens of millions of people around the globe consider themselves creators, and the creator economy represents the “fastest-growing type of small business,” according to a 2020 [report](#) by the venture capital firm SignalFire.

Lorenz, 2021; Img credit: ResearchCI

A background image featuring four people and a dog. On the left is a man with dark hair. In the center is a small, fluffy dog. To the right of the dog is a smiling woman with long dark hair. On the far right is a man with dark hair and round sunglasses. The entire image has a light purple overlay.

"CREATORS"

- CULTURAL PRODUCERS WHO ARE LARGELY PLATFORM-DEPENDENT
- IN ADDITION TO THE LABOR OF *CREATING*, THEY ALSO DISTRIBUTE, MARKET, AND (ASPIRE TO) MONETIZE THEIR CONTENT AND/OR PERSONAE (POELL ET AL., 2021; SEE ALSO, CUNNINGHAM & CRAIG, 2021; GLATT, 2021)

STUDYING LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CREATORS

- 2018-2020: 30 interviews with influencers and creators across Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Pinterest (Duffy et. al., 2021)
- 2021-2022: 35+ interviews with marginalized creators across Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitch (Duffy & Meisner, 2022; Book in progress)

Creator careers are structured by both the *promise* and *precarity* of platform visibility.


```
graph TD; A[Market Precarity] --> B[Industry Ecology Precarity]; B --> C[Algorithmic Precarity];
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Market Precarity

Industry Ecology
Precarity

Algorithmic Precarity

Algorithmic Precarity



reckoning with the volatility of platform's (largely invisible) algorithmic systems is understood as *a necessary part of the job* (Duffy et al., 2021)

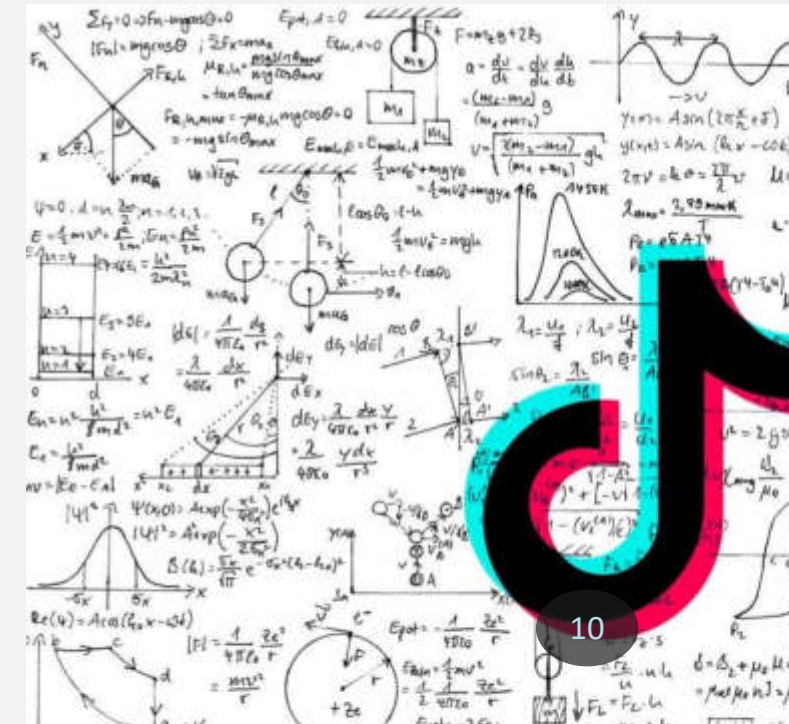
ALGORITHMIC PRECARITY

”There are risks associated with making this your career...—you’re very much at the mercy of algorithm changes or whatever changes that the platforms are going to make and you can have “
-Valerie, Instagram artist

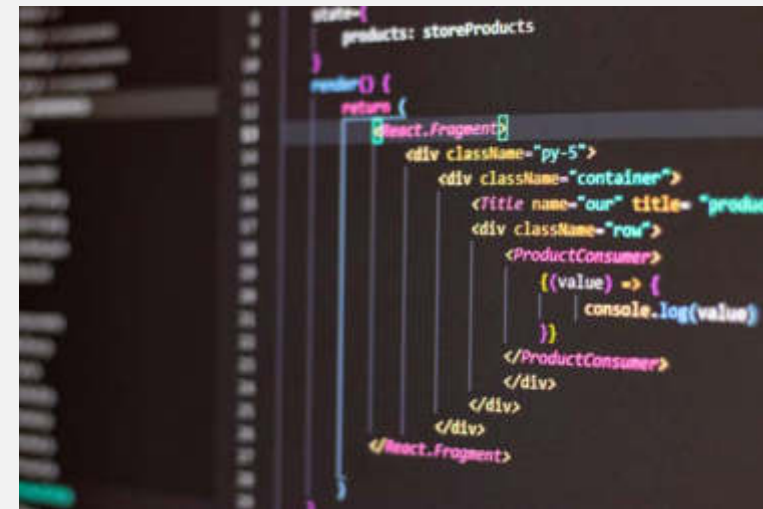


Algorithmic Precarity

Cooper (TikTok): “something that’s worth noting is the unpredictability of the algorithm on TikTok. It’s not always super consistent, and for some, you’ll go through a week or two where your views are only half of what your views are in either weeks. And even if the production of your content – the quality – isn’t changing, *you really have no way of knowing sometimes how things work.*”



FOLK THEORIES OF “HOW THINGS WORK”



```
state={
  products: storeProducts
}
render() {
  return (
    <React.Fragment>
      <div className="py-5">
        <div className="container">
          <Title name="our" title="product">
            <div className="row">
              <ProductConsumer>
                {(value) => {
                  console.log(value)
                }}
              </ProductConsumer>
            </div>
          </div>
        </div>
      </React.Fragment>
    )
  }
}
```

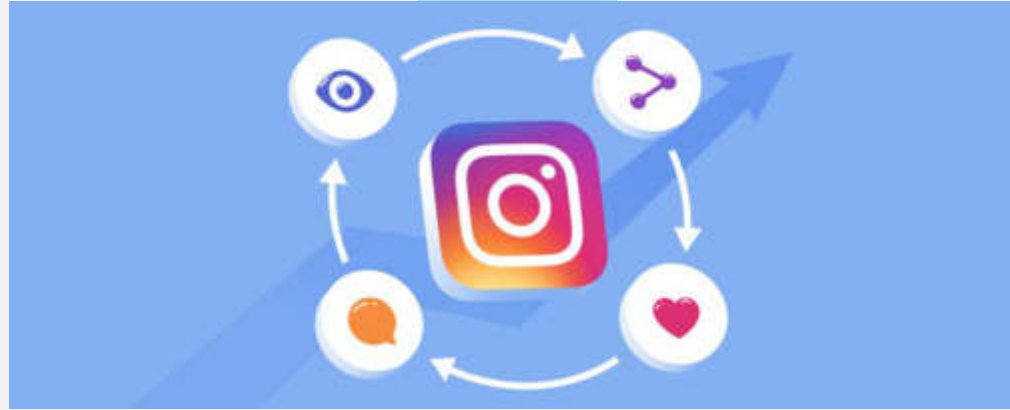
See also: Bishop, 2020; 2021; Bucher, 2019; Klawitter & Hargittai, 2019; Christin, 2020; Cotter, 2020; Eslami et al, 2021)

“How Things Work”

“countless hours...looking at the algorithm, and trying to learn new things...I’m part of Discord groups that talk about the algorithm, and what works, and what sticks, and how to get engagement.....I’ve looked at all the charts of posting times, and when’s the highest engagement, and the keywords...” (Marshall)

“takes hours out of my day that I could be working on art.....[but I have to} educate myself on the algorithm” (Ella)...





Lana; "I don't think anybody really knows for sure [how the algorithm works],...it's just kind of like, hey I've noticed this, and hey I've noticed that, and if you do this Instagram will punish you, and if you do that Instagram will reward you. So it's kind of just word of mouth, and nothing's really confirmed or denied, and it's like be on the safe side versus this is getting ridiculous that you have to take these super careful extreme measures to not get punished by Instagram.



Algorithmic

“Punishments:”

Demonetization Blocking,
Blacklisting, Shadowbanning

(see also, Bishop; 2021; Myers-West, 2018; Caplan &
Gillespie, 2020; Cotter, 2022)



“

“Every time I make a video about the gay community or the trans community or whatever, I kind of feel like – at this point – I have to walk on eggshells because the chances of it getting taken down are so high...” -
Caroline

Marginalized Creators Attempts to Ward off Visibility Punishments"

	COMPLIANT	RESISTANT
ANTICIPATORY	Suppression	Experimentation
REACTIVE	Resignation	Circumvention

(Duffy & Meisner,
2022)

Creator Discipline: Suppression

“I did have someone ask me if I use the hashtag ‘AsianWomen’ because they told me not to [use it]. They said that one was often shadowbanned.”

“If you create hashtags on your post, Black is not a hashtag that you can use. But any other color is possible.”



Self-Censorship to avoid “punishments”

Tate: (On representing an underwear brand). “We were shamed our whole lives for what our body look like, and now, we’re being told we can be free, but then, we’re being shut down [by platform flagging mechanisms] if we show up as ourselves.

“There’s so many...accounts that I think of where there content just gets flagged, and so, they have to **change the kinda content they produce** because they don’t want to lose their accounts and their livelihood....





EXPERIMENTATION: "ALGO-SPEAK":

“If I use [the] hashtag “trans,” my video’s gonna go under review for a couple minutes. But I know that no one can write “sex,” so we write it like S-E-G-G-S.”

“If I do #crossdresser, #genderfluid, #queercouple, which are often hashtags that I use, [it] ain’t gonna get seen.....If the hashtag is as simple as, you know, it’s high heels or whatever just related to fashion, definitely a better chance of visibility. Anything that’s related to the LGBTQ+ community definitely does not see nearly as much.”

CONTESTING
“PUNISHMENTS”:
WHO YOU KNOW



(Perceived) Insider Access

“Instagram never responds to you, unless you already know somebody who works there. “

“I know one of my friends, she has a management company, and they have an inside on TikTok and they tell her what hashtag to use and stuff. But I don't have that.”



(Perceived) Insider Knowledge



“I have friends that have rather large YouTube channels. And from what I’ve heard is that if there is a video that has been flagged, YouTube and an actual person from YouTube works very closely with the creator to find out more about the content...They don’t just take something down, and then you never hear from them again” (as they do with small creators)” -Jen

Reaffirms tiered governance structure across mainstream platforms (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020)

(Perceived) Bias in the Appeals Process



Lynn: I honestly think a lot of it has to do with the moderators and their own bias, because if you appeal something, that's the one time that they have an actual person looking. The rest of the time, it's like, it's a computer, it's an algorithm thing trying to be able to determine if something violates a rule... But if you come across somebody who doesn't like fat people or doesn't like people of color or doesn't like women or, you know, doesn't like disabled people, someone has any kind of bias, they're going to look at that and they're going to go, ugh.... I don't want this. And it's their personal like, not whether or not a rule is actually broken, but whether or not they don't like what they see, and that's it (the content remains banned)."

CONCLUSIONS

Algorithmic sense-making is part of invisible labor that structures these careers.

Just as platform visibility is allocated unevenly, so, too is invisibility → censorship.

“Hypervisibility and invisibility are contrasts to visibility and represent different manifestations of the same oppressive forces, subjugation and devaluation.” – Buchanan and Settles, 2019

Creators Amid an “Uncertain” Platform Environment?





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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