

## The Political Economy of Audiences in Indonesia's Shopee Ecosystem: Commodification, Consumption, and Production of Meaning in the Digital Era

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**ABSTRACT:** This study discusses how Shopee manages user data and digital features to commodify audiences and create structured consumption patterns through gamification and algorithms in the era of digital capitalism. The main objective of this study is to analyze Shopee's strategy in utilizing data and interactive features to increase consumption while building social relations that benefit the platform. Using a media political economy approach, qualitative research through literature review, this study explores the interaction between users, algorithms, and features such as Shopee Live, Feed, and Games. The study results show that data-based personalization and gamification strategies increase loyalty and create user dependence on the platform. In conclusion, Shopee has succeeded in maximizing profits through data exploitation. Still, it has also created an imbalance of power in managing user data, limiting its control over personal information.

**Keywords:** Media Political Economy, Audience Commodification, Shopee.



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## INTRODUCTION

E-commerce has experienced exponential growth in Indonesia over the past decade, with Shopee being one of the major players influencing people's consumption patterns. The platform provides buying and selling services and forms a complex digital ecosystem through interactive features such as Shopee Live and Shopee Feed and incentive-based gamification such as Shopee Games. This phenomenon shows a shift from traditional consumption to a more dynamic model, where the audience not only plays the role of passive consumers but also as producers of data and meaning that companies leverage for commercial advantage (Fuchs, 2015).

Data from We Are Social (2023) notes that Indonesia has more than 217 million internet users, with more than 90% using e-commerce for daily needs. Shopee dominates the market share with an average of 80 million visits per month in 2023, making it a platform that offers not only the convenience of shopping but also an entertaining experience through gamification features (Wang

et al., 2022). However, behind this success, there is a practice of audience commodification that has social and economic implications. Audiences not only buy products but also target algorithms designed to increase engagement through personalization of ads and promotions (Smythe, n.d.-b).

In theory, the concept of audience commodification by Dallas Smythe (1981) provides a relevant analytical framework to understand how Shopee utilizes user data as an economic asset. In this context, audiences become "commodities" traded through the digital capitalist system (Fuchs & Sevignani, n.d.). In addition, the media-political economy approach from Golding and Murdock (1991) helps explain the relationship between economic structure, media production, and cultural consumption in the Shopee ecosystem. This perspective is relevant because Shopee is not only a medium of commerce but also a space where social and cultural value is produced and distributed through interaction between users and the platform's algorithms.

Shopee also uses gamification as a tool to create an addictive user experience and increase customer loyalty (McGuigan, 2012). Gamification effectively changes consumer behavior through emotional incentives, such as a sense of competition and instant rewards. However, this practice also increases the risk of uncontrolled consumptive behavior, especially among the younger generation, who are vulnerable to the influence of digital marketing strategies (Chen, 2022).

The relevance of this research is increasingly evident when considering the impact of Shopee's algorithmic structure on the production and distribution of meaning. In Stuart Hall's (1980) approach to the encoding/decoding model, the audience receives the message passively and interprets and reproduces meaning based on their social and cultural context. Features such as Shopee Live and Shopee Feed create a space where consumers can become content producers that shape the value perception of a product or brand. However, these interactions are not completely autonomous because they are influenced by Shopee's algorithmic design, which is explicitly directed to optimize the company's profits through big data analysis (Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen, 2023).

Furthermore, Shopee introduced gamification to maintain user engagement through leaderboards, digital rewards, and daily incentives. This strategy creates a phenomenon of digital dependency where users feel compelled to return to the platform regularly, either to claim rewards or participate in game-based activities (Rozalén, 2024). According to Chen & Cheung (2022), gamification models emphasize the user's emotional experience, often blurring the line between rational and impulsive consumption. Thus, gamification is not only a tool of entertainment but also a capitalistic strategy to deepen the economic exploitation of users' time and attention.

However, this model presents significant ethical and regulatory challenges. In the Indonesian context, where internet penetration is high but digital literacy levels are still low, audiences are vulnerable to data exploitation and predatory marketing strategies that encourage excessive consumptive behavior (Susilo & Rahayu, 2021). In the absence of strict regulation, platforms like Shopee can take advantage of this loophole to optimize profits while ignoring their social responsibility to consumers.

This research is important because it makes a theoretical and practical contribution to understanding how digital capitalism operates in Indonesia, especially through e-commerce platforms. Using the political economy framework of the media, the study not only sheds light on the relationship between production, distribution, and consumption in the context of Shopee, but also opens up a discussion about the need for fair regulation to protect consumers and ensure that digital business models benefit not only corporations but society as a whole.

### **Research Formulation**

The digital ecosystem built by Shopee in Indonesia reflects the complex dynamics of the media political economy, where audiences are no longer just passive consumers but part of a digital capitalism mechanism that integrates consumption, commodification, and meaning production. Shopee leverages user data collected through interactive features such as Shopee Live, Shopee Feed, and gamification to optimize algorithm-based business strategies. This data, which includes shopping behavior, interaction patterns, and user preferences, is treated as an economic asset for commercial purposes, in accordance with the concept of audience commodification expressed by Smythe (1981:8), where the audience is considered a product traded to advertisers and business partners(Smythe, n.d.-a).

Shopee's gamification strategies, such as daily rewards, leaderboard competitions, and other gaming elements, have established addictive user engagement patterns, increasing customer loyalty and extending platform interaction time. This phenomenon is in line with Rozalén's (2024: 35) view that gamification is designed to harness user emotions to create digital dependence, thereby encouraging impulsive consumptive behavior. In the Indonesian context, where people's digital literacy is still low (Susilo & Rahayu, 2021: 74), this kind of strategy risks increasing audience exploitation, especially in younger age groups who are more vulnerable to the influence of incentive-based marketing technology.

Furthermore, the interactions that occur in features such as Shopee Feed and Shopee Live reflect the production and distribution of meaning in an algorithm- controlled digital environment. The audience is not only the message's recipient but also the content producers who shape the social and cultural value of a particular product or brand. However, this process is not fully autonomous because it is dictated by Shopee's algorithmic design, which is strategically directed to optimize profits through big data analysis (Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen, 2023: 19). In Hall's view (1980: 136), the encoding/decoding model shows that although audiences have the ability to interpret messages, the social, cultural, and technological contexts and structures play an important role in limiting their autonomy(Hall, n.d.).

Shopee's commodification of audiences also creates significant ethical and regulatory challenges. In this model of digital capitalism, users' time and attention are utilized as economic assets, while protecting personal data is often a secondary concern. Without adequate regulation, companies like Shopee can continue to exploit legal loopholes to maximize profits while ignoring their social responsibilities (Fuchs, 2024: 56). This is relevant in the context of Indonesia, where regulations related to data protection and control over platform algorithms are still minimal, so users are more

vulnerable to the risk of data exploitation and excessive consumptive behavior. Thus, the identification of problems in this study centers on how Shopee manages audiences as an economic commodity, the impact of gamification on audience consumption behavior, and how meaning production occurs through audience interaction in Shopee's digital ecosystem. This study uses the perspective of media political economy to analyze the linkages between the structure of the digital economy, commodification strategies, and the social implications of platform capitalism.

## Research Questions

From the identification of these problems, the questions of this research are:

1. How does Shopee utilize audiences as a commodity in its digital ecosystem-based business strategy in Indonesia?
2. How does Shopee's gamification and social interaction strategy shape the consumption pattern of the audience in the digital ecosystem?
3. How does producing meaning occur through audience interaction in the features provided by Shopee, such as Shopee Live and Shopee Feed?

## Research Objectives

1. Analyze how Shopee manages and utilizes audiences as part of a digital capitalism-based business model.
2. Examining how Shopee's gamification and social interaction strategies shape audience consumption behavior in its ecosystem.
3. Revealing the process of production and distribution of meaning that takes place through the interaction between the audience and Shopee features in an algorithmic and capitalistic context.

## Political Economy of Media

The political economy of the audience in the Shopee Indonesia ecosystem is relevant to research in the context of digital media transformation, where the audience is not only passive consumers but also an integral part of the production and distribution process of economic value and meaning. Based on the concept introduced by Dallas Smythe, digital audiences can be understood as commodities traded to advertisers. In the context of Shopee, audience activities, such as browsing products, liking items, giving reviews, and interacting with gamification features such as Shopee Games, are a form of digital work that generates data to be monetized (Smythe, 1977: 3). This data is processed into strategic economic assets that provide commercial value through advertising optimization and service personalization.

The relationship between production, distribution, and consumption in the Shopee ecosystem

shows a cycle interconnected and influenced by technology. Production on Shopee involves entrepreneurs who create goods and audiences who produce reviews and preferences, create promotional content through social media, or even become digital "resellers." Distribution occurs through marketing algorithms and strategies integrating social media, Shopee platforms, and third-party applications to reach consumers. Meanwhile, consumption by the audience on Shopee is not only material but also symbolic, where shopping becomes part of a lifestyle managed through features such as flash sales and thematic advertising campaigns (Golding & Murdock, n.d.).

Golding and Murdock's perspective highlights how the political economy of the audience involves the integration of social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Shopee is an e-commerce platform that creates a digital ecosystem that regulates people's interaction patterns with products and services. The shopping experience on Shopee, with features such as live shopping, gives the audience a feeling of active participation. Still, they are in a consumption circle constantly governed by the logic of digital capitalism (Fuchs, 2015: 24). In this context, the audience is commodified through their monitored and recorded activities to create the company's profits.

Previous research has shown that digital platforms like Shopee combine the dimensions of consumption and production of meaning. For example, a study on the economy of attention by Christian Fuchs (2015: 30) explains how user attention becomes a major resource in platform capitalism. In Shopee, this can be seen from the gamification features and major campaigns such as the "Shopee 12.12 Birthday Sale," which creates audience engagement and builds a narrative of consumption culture in the digital era. These narratives leverage the power of algorithms to personalize the audience experience, creating loyalty while extending interaction time.

Furthermore, Vince Manzerolle (2010: 17) describes how mobile devices expand audience commodification in the digital age (Manzerolle, 2010). In the case of Shopee Indonesia, strategies such as push notifications and data-driven recommendations create an always-on relationship between the audience and the platform. This increases direct consumption and converts every interaction into data that is leveraged for economic benefits.

### **Audience Plurality**

Audience plurality is one of the important elements in media studies, especially in explaining the diversity, complexity, and role of audiences in the modern communication ecosystem. Biltereyst and Meers (2011: 217) state that audiences cannot be reduced to a single, homogeneous entity. In contrast, an audience is a category of individuals and groups with diverse social, economic, cultural, and political characteristics (Biltereyst & Meers, 2011). In this approach, audiences are understood as active, selective, and capable of creating meaning based on their social and cultural contexts.

Audiences can be seen from multiple dimensions, including consumers, citizens, and cultural subjects. In the dimension of a consumer, the audience is involved in media consumption as part of the process of media capitalism. Studies such as those conducted by Napoli (2011: 35) highlight that audiences are marketing targets and objects of ever-evolving commercialization strategies, such as content personalization through digital algorithms (Napoli, 2011). This reinforces the view that audiences are part of a value chain that the media industry optimizes for economic gain.

As citizens, audiences play a role in building democratic discussions and political literacy. Livingstone (2004:79) emphasizes the importance of understanding how audiences use media to access information, form opinions, and participate in democratic processes (Livingstone,n.d.). In this context, the media is responsible for providing information that is entertaining and supports social engagement. This perspective puts the audience in a strategic position as active actors in the political and social ecosystem.

In addition, the audience also acts as a cultural subject. They not only passively receive media messages but also interpret and reproduce meanings based on their experiences, values, and identities (Morley, 2000: 125). The culture of participation described by Jenkins (2006: 3) further emphasizes that the audience today plays the role of producers and consumers (prosumers) in the digital media ecosystem. They create content, share experiences, and influence the flow of information through digital platforms.

In the era of globalization and digitalization, the plurality of audiences is becoming increasingly relevant. Audiences from different backgrounds consume the same content but often interpret it differently, depending on their local context (Couldry, 2012). This perspective is important in understanding the increasingly complex audience dynamics in the global era, where audiences interact with cross-cultural content that enriches their experience while creating new challenges in media research. In conclusion, the plurality of the audience shows that the audience is a diverse, active, and complex actor in its interaction with the media. Understanding audiences as consumers, citizens, and cultural subjects enriches media studies and provides a more comprehensive foundation for analyzing their role in the modern media ecosystem.

### **Production and Circulation of Meaning**

The production and circulation of meaning in digital media is a process that involves dynamic interactions between producers, mediums, and users. Stuart Hall (1980: 128), through the encoding/decoding model, provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding this process. In this model, Hall explains that media producers do not solely encode meaning but are also actively decoded by audiences based on their cultural, social, and ideological positions. This model includes three main positions of audience decoding: dominant-hegemonic, negotiation, and opposition. In digital media, such as social media platforms, this model highlights how users consume, interpret, and even reproduce meaning critically according to their context.

Popular culture theory further enriches understanding of the interaction between platforms and users. As described by Fiske (1989: 32), popular culture is not only a product of the dominance of cultural capitalism but also a space in which audiences can negotiate and oppose dominant meanings(Fiske, n.d.). In digital platforms, users actively create meaning through their content, such as reviews, memes, or short videos. This process creates a "culture of participation" (Jenkins, 2006), where meaning is circulated by media producers and reworked by users to reflect their experiences and values.

The interaction between platforms and users in producing and circulating meaning also reflects digital platforms' economic logic and culture. Gillespie (2010: 350) highlights that the algorithms of

platforms like YouTube or TikTok determine what content users see and shape how they produce and share meaning. These algorithms often reinforce dominant narratives, but users can also leverage them to create alternative meanings that defy or recontextualize those narratives (Gillespie, 2010).

In addition, popular culture theory also shows how meaning is fluid in digital platform interactions. For example, the culture of remixing in short videos on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok reflects how the meanings encoded by media producers can be altered and circulated in new forms that often bring criticism or humor (Shifman, 2014: 62). This process creates a complex ecosystem of meaning circulation where the audience becomes a prosumer—both a producer and a consumer of content. In conclusion, the production and circulation of meaning in digital media is a multifaceted process that involves dynamics between producers, platforms, and audiences. Through Hall's encoding/decoding model and popular culture theory, it can be understood that meaning in media is never static but is constantly negotiated and circulated by various actors in the digital media ecosystem.

### **Digitalization and Commodification**

Digitalization and commodification have changed the way e-commerce works, especially through the application of algorithms and data mining. Algorithms play a major role in determining the user experience by providing personalized recommendations based on historical data and consumer behavior. In e-commerce such as Shopee or Amazon, algorithms are used to analyze big data to identify consumer preferences, predict their needs, and increase the likelihood of transactions. As expressed by Gillespie (2014: 173), algorithms are a technical tool and a cultural force that shapes how users access and understand information. Meanwhile, the data mining process gathers valuable information from consumer activity, including purchasing patterns, ad interactions, and promotion responses. This data is processed into economic assets that can be monetized through more targeted marketing strategies.

In e-commerce, the impact of algorithms and data mining creates a new commodification model in which user behavior becomes the main resource being traded. Zuboff (2019: 96) explains that surveillance capitalism exploits user data to generate behavioral predictions, which are then sold to advertisers and third parties. This process improves business efficiency and expands the company's control over consumer behavior.

In addition, gamification has become one of the strategies used to shape consumer behavior in e-commerce platforms. Gamification refers to the application of game design elements in a non-game context to increase user engagement and loyalty (Deterding et al., 2011: 9). In e-commerce, features such as loyalty points, daily challenges, or games with attractive rewards, such as those found on Shopee through Shopee Games, create interactive experiences designed to motivate purchases and increase app usage time.

Previous research has shown that gamification utilizes intrinsic and extrinsic motivational elements to influence consumer behavior. For example, Hamari et al. (2014: 302) found that gamification increases user participation and loyalty by providing reward-based incentives, such as

discounts or virtual rewards. This feature encourages transactions and strengthens the user's emotional attachment to the platform. In this context, consumers are buyers and part of a gaming ecosystem designed to create sustainable consumption habits.

The consequences of digitalization and commodification through algorithms and gamification impact not only consumer behavior but also how companies understand and leverage their audiences. Combining data mining and gamification allows companies to create business

models that leverage user data and create personalized, curated consumer experiences to increase engagement and revenue.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a critical paradigm, which focuses on analyzing power structures in social, economic, and technological systems, especially in the context of digital platforms. Critical paradigms see e-commerce, such as Shopee, as a space where economic and technological forces work to shape patterns of interaction, consumption, and meaningful production in a digital society (Mosco & L., 2009).

This paradigm views audiences as consumers and commodities utilized to generate profits through their data, attention, and engagement. Within the Shopee ecosystem, features such as Shopee Live, Shopee Feed, and Shopee Games are designed to increase user engagement time, which is converted into economic value through advertising, product sales, and other activities (Fuchs, 2014: 102). The critical paradigm allows this research to uncover the hidden control mechanisms in the digital platform business model and its implications for people's consumption behavior.

This study uses a scientific approach to media political economy with qualitative research through a literature review to analyze the relationship between the audience, the Shopee platform, and the structure of the digital economy. The media's political economy approach views Shopee as a capitalist instrument integrating digital technology to control audience consumption through interactive features and data-driven algorithms. This perspective allows for an in-depth analysis of how user data is collected, processed, and used to create economic benefits while influencing consumption and production of meaning (Fuchs, 2014: 100). Using a political economy model. The study explores how audiences are transformed into commodities that provide economic value to platforms through features such as Shopee Live, Shopee Feed, and Shopee Games.

Additionally, a qualitative approach is used to better understand the audience's experiences and behavior patterns. Data was collected through in-depth interviews designed to explore audience perceptions of using Shopee's features. In contrast, direct observation of activities within the platform was used to identify digital interaction patterns (Silverman, 2016).

A literature review is also an important element in this approach, integrating previous research on audience commodification and the digital economy in Indonesia to strengthen the analytical framework. Previous studies, such as research by Nugroho, Siregar, and Putri (2020: 71), provide important insights into the role of data and technology in shaping people's consumption behavior in the digital era (Nugroho et al., 2020).

This research method includes structured elements, including research subjects and objects, data sources, data collection techniques, data verification, and data analysis. The subject of the study was Shopee's audience in Indonesia, who were selected from various age groups, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds to capture diverse perspectives on their consumption patterns and digital interactions. Meanwhile, the research object includes Shopee's digital features, such as Shopee Live and Shopee Games, which are the main tools in shaping consumption patterns and meaning production. The data used in this study include primary data collected through in-depth interviews and direct observations, as well as secondary data obtained from academic literature and related reports.

The data collection technique involves semi-structured interviews to explore audience experiences, perceptions, and observations of Shopee features to understand how interactions and meanings are built through digital activities. Data verification is done through triangulation, comparing data from interviews, observations, and literature to ensure validity and reliability.

The data analysis process is carried out thematically using an inductive approach. The collected data identified themes such as consumption patterns, commodification mechanisms, and meaning production, allowing this study to describe the relationship between economic-political forces and audience consumption behavior (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This systematic approach aims to provide a comprehensive picture of how the Shopee ecosystem impacts the consumption and production of meaning in Indonesia's digital society.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Audience Commodification by Shopee**

Shopee, as an e-commerce platform in Indonesia, is a clear example of how audiences in the digital era are not only passive consumers but also highly valuable objects of commodification. This commodification process begins with collecting user data, which is carried out massively and systematically. Every user interaction on the platform—including product searches, clicks on promotions, time spent in the app, and transaction patterns—is collected and analyzed using advanced algorithms. This data becomes a valuable asset that is not only used to improve Shopee's internal performance but also traded in the form of more targeted advertising or sold to third parties for economic gain. The political economy perspective of media (Moscow, 2009: 43) helps explain how this practice creates a new dependency between users and platforms, where users voluntarily provide their data without understanding the commercial implications.

Shopee implements a data-driven personalization strategy that allows every user to feel like they have a "unique" and relevant shopping experience. Through behavioral data algorithms, Shopee can provide product recommendations, personalized discount promotions, and advertisements designed according to user needs and preferences. This strategy not only increases consumption but also extends the time of user engagement on the platform, a strategy known as the "attention economy" (Fuchs, 2014:97). In a critical view, personalization is not a form of consumer empowerment, but rather an effective way to control their consumption behavior. Shopee creates

an ecosystem so that users feel as if they are in full control, even though all their interactions are directed by algorithms designed to maximize the platform's profits (Zuboff, 2019).

Features like Shopee Live, Shopee Feed, and Shopee Games are essential for this mechanism. Shopee Live, for example, offers a live shopping experience that allows users to interact in real time with sellers. This feature leverages social psychology to create a sense of urgency and engagement, ultimately increasing real-time transactions. Similarly, the gamification within Shopee Games is designed to capitalize on users' passion for rewards and discounts, encouraging them to stay engaged in the app for longer. Nugroho et al. (2020: 72) point out that these features are not only entertainment tools but also very strategic tools to manipulate consumption patterns and create repeat shopping habits among users.

From the perspective of media political economy, Shopee has also managed to integrate local cultural elements to strengthen user loyalty. Campaigns such as Shopee Barokah, which leverages local religious and cultural values, show how the platform can repackage traditional values for commercial purposes. By promoting halal products and religious value-based campaigns, Shopee creates the impression that they understand the specific needs of local audiences while also building an image as a culturally relevant platform (Tifani, 2022: 57). This strategy illustrates what Moscow (2009: 46) calls the flexibility of capitalism, in which local and cultural ideologies are used as tools to achieve global capitalist goals.

However, behind this strategy, there is a significant power imbalance. In the relationship structure between users and the platform, Shopee has full control over the data generated by users. This data, which directly reflects consumer preferences and behaviors, is collected without much awareness from users about how their data will be leveraged or monetized. This process, as outlined by Zuboff (2019:141), reflects a new form of exploitation in the digital age, where individuals lose their rights to personal information and become a resource that continues to be exploited for corporate profit. This confirms the argument that the digital economy has created a new production relationship in which users lose control over their data and are positioned as "products" in the digital capitalist system.

In addition, the structure based on algorithms also creates another problem, namely the reinforcement of consumer behavioral biases. Shopee's algorithm reinforces certain consumption patterns by providing recommendations based on historical data, limiting user choice, and creating a recurring consumption cycle. This reduces users' ability to make decisions autonomously while also increasing their dependence on the platform (Nixon, 2016: 84).

From a critical perspective, Shopee's commodification of audiences is not only an economic issue but also a political and cultural issue. This practice shows how digital capitalism's forces dominate and control individual behavior through seemingly harmless mechanisms such as personalization and interactivity. Shopee leverages user data for economic gain and reshapes social and cultural meaning through algorithm-driven campaigns. As a result, users are not only consumers but commodities exploited to sustain digital capitalism's dominance.

### **Gamification and Audience Consumption Behavior**

Gamification has become an effective strategy for Shopee to influence audience consumption patterns while strengthening loyalty. Features such as Shopee Games and flash sales are designed to create a pleasant shopping experience while leading users to more impulsive consumption patterns. Flash sales, for example, play an important role in creating a sense of urgency through limited-time promotions, making users feel like they have to buy the product immediately to avoid missing out on the opportunity. Studies show this mechanism has successfully improved impulsive shopping behavior, especially among young users (Dellyana, 2024). This condition shows how Shopee utilizes the principle of attention economy (Fuchs, 2014: 97), where the platform manages user attention as a resource to be processed into economic benefits.

In addition, gamification through Shopee Games provides incentives to users in the form of prizes, points, and discount vouchers that encourage them to continue to engage with the platform. Users' sense of accomplishment when they win a prize creates deep emotional satisfaction, strengthening the connection between users and the platform. Rahman and Suswanto (2023: 42) show that users who frequently participate in gamification have a higher level of loyalty to Shopee (Rahman & Suswanto, 2023). The positive emotional experience resulting from this activity encourages users to return to using the platform, thereby increasing the frequency of consumption.

However, behind this strategy's success, user dependency dynamics need to be considered critically. Shopee, through entertainment features such as Shopee Games and Shopee Live, is slowly building consumption patterns structured by algorithms. These features serve as entertainment and a tool to increase the time users spend on the platform. Interactions in Shopee Live, for example, utilize social psychology by providing a live shopping experience that allows users to feel a personal connection with the seller, thus encouraging them to make transactions in real time (Wibowo et al., 2023: 63).

This dependency is reinforced by algorithms designed to provide product recommendations based on user behavior data. Nixon (2016: 84) notes that this algorithm reinforces certain consumption patterns by presenting choices corresponding to the user's purchase history, thus limiting their exploration of other alternatives (Nixon, 2016). This shows how Shopee uses user data not only to increase sales but also to create a consumption cycle that is difficult to break. This perspective aligns with the concept of surveillance capitalism outlined by Zuboff (2019:141), where users not only play the role of consumers but also as data sources that are exploited for the benefit of the platform.

This dependency creates a new unbalanced production relationship, where Shopee has complete control over user data, while users do not fully understand how their data is utilized. Nugroho et al. (2020: 72) note that this process reflects exploitation in the digital economy, where consumer behavior is directed toward maximizing corporate profits. This dynamic shows that seemingly enjoyable entertainment features are strategic mechanisms to manipulate consumption and create unstoppable loyalty.

Using the critical perspective of the media's political economy, it can be said that gamification on Shopee is a tool to increase consumption and form users' dependence on the platform. Shopee

managed to create an ecosystem where users feel empowered through personalization and incentives, but in reality, they are under the control of an algorithm designed to maximize capitalist profits. This shows how digital capitalism works to dominate individual behavior through seemingly harmless mechanisms, such as gamification and interactivity.

### **Production of Meaning through Social Interaction on Shopee**

Shopee Live and Shopee Feed have become very strategic interaction spaces in building meaning among audiences while strengthening Shopee's position as a platform that integrates social and commercial functions. Through this feature, users act as consumers and content producers, creating new dynamics in the digital ecosystem. Shopee Live, for example, presents an interactive shopping experience where sellers can communicate directly with potential buyers through live broadcasts. These interactions create a social space that allows for the exchange of information, builds trust, and stimulates purchase decisions in real time (Matthew et al., 2021). In this context, Shopee provides e-commerce services and creates a social experience that strengthens the emotional connection between sellers and buyers.

The Shopee Feed, on the other hand, serves as a space where users can share reviews, recommend products, or showcase their lifestyles through photos and videos. The content these users produce shows how the audience becomes a producer of meaning and a consumer. Sundjaja and Arisanto (2020: 56) highlight that this feature strengthens user engagement by building a sense of community among them. Users promote the product and provide social validation to other audiences through the reviews and testimonials they share (Sundjaja & Arisanto, 2020). This validation becomes critical in other users' purchasing decisions, demonstrating how Shopee Feed combines meaning production with community-based marketing mechanisms.

However, this dynamic also shows how Shopee strategically utilizes user-generated content to strengthen its commercial position. The user's role as a content producer reduces Shopee's need to create marketing materials directly, shifting this responsibility to the user community. Nixon (2016: 82) notes that this model reflects a new form of exploitation in which platforms use the digital workforce of audiences to create value without equal compensation. In the Shopee ecosystem, users provide their behavioral data and actively produce content that directly supports the platform's profits.

Social interaction in Shopee Live and Shopee Feed is also important for creating locally relevant cultural narratives. Campaigns such as Shopee Barokah, which leverages local religious and cultural values, show how Shopee uses these spaces to build meaning that resonates with local audiences. Tifani (2022: 57) mentioned that content production integrated with local cultural elements creates a stronger connection between users and the platform (Tifani, 2022). By prioritizing local values, Shopee can construct a meaning that supports commercial goals and strengthens user loyalty.

From a critical perspective, the role of users as content producers and consumers also raises questions about power relations in the digital ecosystem. Although users seem to have control over the content they create, the actual control remains in Shopee's hands. For example, algorithms that determine the visibility and distribution of content ensure that content that supports Shopee's

commercial goals gets a higher priority. Zuboff (2019: 143) calls this phenomenon a form of colonization of social space in which seemingly spontaneous and authentic interactions are governed by the logic of digital capitalism.

Thus, Shopee Live and Feed create an ecosystem that blurs the boundaries between consumption and production while placing users as a central element in creating commercial value. While this feature provides space for social interaction and the production of meaning, users still operate within a structure designed to support the dominance of digital capitalism. In this context, Shopee has successfully leveraged social interaction as a tool to expand its control over audience consumption behavior, making it a model that reflects the transformation of the modern digital economy.

## CONCLUSION

Shopee leverages a complex media political economy strategy to manage audiences as consumers and commercial products through user data collection and analysis. The algorithmic personality creates a shopping experience that seems unique yet systematically directs the consumption behavior that benefits the platform. Gamification and interactive features such as Shopee Games, flash sales, and Shopee Live have proven effective in building user dependence on the Shopee ecosystem, reinforcing impulsive consumption patterns and long-term loyalty. In addition, the social interactions that occur through Shopee Feed and Live allow users to produce content that supports commercial value and reinforces local cultural narratives. While this strategy brings great economic benefits, there is a significant inequality of power, especially in managing users' data, and audiences are often unaware of the consequences. This practice reflects how digital capitalism dominates individual behavior through seemingly neutral technology and interactivity.

From the findings of this research, the suggestions of this study:

- Stricter regulations related to managing user data by e-commerce platforms to protect user privacy.
- Increasing digital literacy to help people understand the impact of the digital economy on their consumption patterns and rights as platform users.
- Research the long-term implications of audience commodification on local culture and economy in the digital era.

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