Digital Slavery in Tiktok Social Media Christian Fuchs Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Initially, the practice of slavery was known as physical violence, this is commonplace in several countries that used to be very thick with the practice of slavery, this era actually transmits various new forms of exploitation, especially through digital media. This article discusses the practice of digital slavery on social media TikTok. The large number of begging practices on social media TikTok indicates an act of exploitation unnoticed by those who do it, this can be referred to as the practice of slavery.This research uses a netnography qualitative descriptive method by tracing and analyzing accounts that often live stream on TikTok by selling themselves. This article wants to answer some of the following questions. First, what is Christian Fuchs' view of the practice of slavery? Second, how is the model of digital slavery on social media TikTok. The results of this study show First, that Fuchs views digital media as having shaped the exploitation and commodification of social media, social media often utilizes data and content generated by users as a source of economic value. In this context, social media users are often unpaid "laborers", as they indirectly contribute to creating value for the platform, but rarely get the equivalent in return. Implications: Slavery is not only through physical touch, but through digital technology.

Keywords: Digital Slavery, Social Media, TikTok, Christian Fuchs

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the phenomenon of slavery in the digital era related to the development of digital technology, especially through the social media TikTok. The concept of digital slavery is used to describe situations where individuals feel trapped or exploited in a digital context. The word "slave" has been known in human history for thousands of years, and slavery has been a part of human civilization throughout the ages (Djerf-Pierre & Pierre, 2016; Jin & Yoon, 2016; Nugraha, 2015; Simonet et al., 2015). Quraish Shihab revealed that slavery was a condition that existed before the presence of Islam, and has become part of the human life system from time to time (Shihab, M. Q. (2018). Islam Yang Disalahpahami: Menepis Prasangka, Mengikis Kekeliruan. Lentera Hati Group., n.d.). Classical slavery refers to the exploitation of slaves who are required to do whatever their master wants them to do (Bosma, U. (2020). Commodification and Slavery in the Nineteenth-Century Indonesian Archipelago. Journal of Social History, 54(1), 109-124.,

n.d.). Examples include hiring humans without pay, constructing buildings, digging waterways, or working in gardens, which were often carried out cruelly by those with power over the slaves (Westermann, W. L. (2019). "The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity." The Classical Journal, 115(3), 267-283., n.d.)

However, in the digital and social media context of TikTok, the author uses the term "digital slavery" figuratively to describe situations involving exploitation, injustice, and psychological distress associated with using the platform. These include pressure to continue to produce and share content, difficulties in obtaining fair compensation, and negative impacts on mental health from performance pressures and social comparison (Chen, 2020; Kariri & Radwan, 2023; Leuenberger, 2007; Li, 2016). It should be noted that this term does not refer to forms of physical slavery that have occurred in history, but rather to problems that have arisen in the digital age and social media. This article aims to discuss this phenomenon and encourage understanding of the social and psychological implications associated with the practice of digital slavery on social media TikTok (Bakici, 2020; Eklöf et al., 2014; Jang & Park, 2020; Rosenfeld et al., 2022).

The number of social media users in Indonesia is very high. In 2020, the number of social media users in Indonesia will reach around 170 million people. Some of the popular social media platforms in Indonesia include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Tik-tok (Rahardaya & Irwansyah, 2021). This figure shows that human interest and involvement in using the internet continues to increase. This indicates that many people are more interested in exploring cyberspace as a new platform to express themselves and get the latest information. Since its launch in 2018, TikTok has become a popular and rapidly growing social media application (app) around the world. As one the most downloaded apps worldwide since 2019, TikTok, together with its Chinese sister-app Douyin, had accumulated over 1 billion monthly active users in early 2020 (Zeng et al., 2021)

One of the social media platforms that is much loved by all groups, namely Tik-tok, from children to parents also enlivens the application platform's homepage (Zahid et al., 2023). Currently, Tik-tok not only provides features for dancing like at the beginning of its appearance, connoisseurs of this application can already make videos of between 15-60 seconds long with text, music, stickers, filters and live streaming to selling online. According to Yang et al, that people's interest in surfing the Tik-tok application is due to several reasons. First, short videos that can be enjoyed by the digital community with a variety of random information.

Second, the level of production is sophisticated, this is because the level of user needs can adjust related things according to preferences. Third, Users can be consumers as well as content producers. Fourth, up-to-date information. Fifth, attractive marketing and finally a promising sales offer (Yang et al., 2019). For this reason, the social media tiktok really attracts the attention of many people, but from these various offers, Tik-tok actually displays the faces of slavery in various forms, how some users sell themselves to be given coins or gifts which in Fuchs' terms are digital workers.

One of the countries known to practice slavery is Egypt. The practice of slavery in ancient Egypt was famous for using slaves to build pyramids, temples, palaces, and various infrastructure development projects at that time. Slaves were forced to work without pay and in harsh conditions (Riggs, C. (2017). "Unwrapping the Pharaohs: How Egyptian Archaeology Confirms the Biblical

Timeline." New Leaf Publishing Group., n.d.). In the 10th century, ancient Greece and Rome also had significant systems of slavery. Many slaves were placed in various jobs, such as mining, road construction, factories, bridges, and so on (Ulinnuha & Arifah, 2020). They often face harsh and unfair working conditions. This practice of slavery is part of human history that reflects the exploitation and oppression of individuals for the benefit of those in power or groups in power. Slavery has become one of the systems that involves deprivation of freedom and inhumane treatment of individuals trapped in that situation (Basuki, 2017).

It is important to understand and remember this history of slavery as part of the human journey, and to commit to fighting all forms of oppression, exploitation and injustice in today's society. There are many factors that can cause someone to become a slave, including poverty, prisoners of war, heredity, kidnapping, revenge, and trading in slaves (Nasution, 2019). Classical slavery, known for its physical violence, has been a part of human history. Unfortunately, the practice of slavery still occurs in its modern form in the current era. The differences between classical and modern slavery involve historical context and changing societal views of slavery. Classical slavery was a system in which slavery was considered normal and not considered a crime at the time. However, over time, people's views and human values began to change.

Various countries then began to abolish the practice of slavery through institutions such as the United Nations (UN) which adopted international treaties and conventions against slavery and made it a crime against humanity (Henny Nuraeny, S. H. (2022). Tindak Pidana Perdagangan Orang Kebijakan Hukum Pidana Dan Pencegahannya. Sinar Grafika., n.d.) Modern slavery practices often involve forms of human exploitation, including human trafficking, forced labor and child labour. This practice violates human rights and is considered a serious crime by the international community. In discussing classical and modern slavery, the author tries to understand the differences in historical contexts and the changing views of society towards slavery. The focus is on a realistic historical view, while recognizing the impact of technological and information developments in a modern context.

Countries had agreed to fight the practice of slavery and protect human rights by ratifying the slavery convention in 1926 (Artanto, 2021). Despite this, slavery still exists in a different form in the modern era, known as modern slavery. Modern slavery involves the exploitation of human rights, such as forced marriage, sexual abuse, sex slaves, begging, drug dealers, and human trafficking (Nuraeny, 2015). The fundamental difference between classical and modern slavery lies in the protection of human rights. Even though regulations have been established both nationally and internationally, the practice of slavery still continues. In addition, the role of technology and information in this era also plays an important role in the practice of modern slavery (Ulinnuha & Arifah, 2020). Modern slavery does not always involve direct physical violence by humans, but technology becomes a party that manipulates and controls individuals like technological slaves. In this digital era, humans can become slaves to technology without any direct physical intervention by other humans. This illustrates the role of technology as an employer that influences and controls individuals.

According to Christian Fuchs' analysis, an Austrian sociologist, that social media is a space for exploitation of a new type which he calls digital slaves (Fuchs, C. (2021). Digital Capitalism: Media, Communication and Society Volume Three. Routledge., n.d.). The development of technology by

giving birth to social media as a forum for interaction turns out to have a very bad side to the pattern of slavery in this era, how can I not? freedom of expression and imagination in cyberspace is in line with the shackles of rights that completely deprive human freedom and dignity. All disgrace is shown, insults, slander to swearing line up neatly in the comments column on human social media at this time. More than that, other modern slavery can be seen by the emergence of various applications, one of which is Tik-tok, the faces of slavery are even more evident when you see people flocking to do live streaming by selling themselves to be ordered anything to get gifts (prizes, coins and so on).

The phenomenon of technological slavery seems to be a vehicle for entertainment regardless of self-esteem. Mud baths, posing in the toilet, dancing pargoy, dousing yourself in river water at night, taking flour baths, and many more portraits of slavery practices being sold on social media Tik-tok. In addition, this phenomenon can also be called a new style of begging for others. Based on this background, the writer tries to explore the slavery activities that were carried out by a number of people when peddling themselves on the Tik-tok social media through the thoughts of Christian Fuhcs. The main questions in this research are: First, what is Christian Fuchs' view of digital slavery ? Second, what is the digital slavery model on Tik-tok social media?

METHOD

This article uses a netnography qualitative descriptive approach that focuses on certain aspects of the phenomenon, According to Kozinets, netnography is a research method specifically designed to investigate and understand cultures and communities that form online ([Yenny & Astuti, 2019](#)). The aim of the qualitative approach is to understand the experiences of the research subjects. The descriptive approach has several objectives, including gathering detailed actual information about phenomena, identifying existing problems and practices, making comparisons, and studying experiences to make decisions and plan for the future ([Rukin, S. P. (2019). Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif. Yayasan Ahmar Cendekia Indonesia., n.d](#).). Qualitative methods are used to collect descriptive data that can provide an understanding of the research subject. A qualitative descriptive approach is suitable for this article, which aims to see how social media TikTok is used by individuals to get gifts or prizes from other users. This research limits the analysis to 5 accounts that live stream on TikTok. Research data was collected through observing the uploads of these accounts. The data is then analyzed using qualitative techniques by describing the findings obtained, and finally concluding the research results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

FUCHS PERSPECTIVE DIGITAL WORKER

Social media is now transformed into a medium of choice for interacting with fellow human beings both on a national and international scale ([Nugroho, C., Sos, S., & Kom, M. I. (2020). Cyber Society: Teknologi, Media Baru, Dan Disrupsi Informasi. Prenada Media., n.d](#).) In its development, social media is considered capable of being a platform that forms the concept of egalitarianism, due to the openness for anyone to access information and exchange ideas. This is considered as a

form of democratic development to oversee various policies and the availability of information in a transparent manner. However, these developments and progress go hand in hand with various shackles in social media.

According to Fuchs, social media has become a new type of exploitation space that subliminally employs its users without getting a salary or wages, this struggle is seen as a form of oppression by investors. Furthermore, Fuchs elaborated on this concept in the book "Digital Labor and Karl Marx". He reviewed the concept of added value from Karl Marx. 100,000, then the capital owner will employ for 12 hours (Fuchs, C. (2014). Digital Labour and Karl Marx. Routledge., n.d.). This according to Marx is the added value that will be obtained by the owner of capital which is converted into profit.

Fuchs views that the availability of the internet by providing social media as a new vehicle has made its users not aware that they are happily working for investors and playing voluntarily. In addition, he also considers that the ideological ability of investors to influence users that it is as if life is meaningless without social media, eventually making many users spend their time without getting a wage or salary. Our various surfing activities on the internet are always commodified, so it becomes difficult to separate which activities are not commodified. It can be said that life on social media has become a factory and workers' work space extends to almost all daily activities.

Source : https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c4n8ez7rz0qo

This then becomes an important element in the accumulation of capital by social media. Social media converts the daily lives of its users into personal gain and all of us who access it are not aware that we have become unpaid laborers to enrich certain parties. In order to increase the hours of internet use, digital platform companies continue to commodify continuously by luring them with the latest services, applications and features. This can be seen from the amount of use of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Whattsap, and Tik-Tok. So far Tik-tok has become a platform that is quite loved by all groups, based on data obtained by statista in 2021, Tik-Tok users around the world are approaching 83 million users (Rahardaya & Irwansyah, 2021) and some of the users come from Indonesia, this data is certain to continue to increase along with the attractive offers that the Tik-tok platform continues to present.

SLAVE MODEL ON TIKTOK

After conducting further searches on several accounts that often appear on the author's homepage, it was found that several accounts were very active in selling themselves in cyberspace. They often display prompts on their Live TikTok screen, hoping that the viewer will give a gift in response. This practice demonstrates an increasing trend among social media users to seek more creative and intensive ways of obtaining financial support. By utilizing interactive tools on platforms such as TikTok, these users try to attract the attention of the audience in the hope of receiving a gift as a form of appreciation or financial support. This phenomenon represents a shift in the way people access and manage financial resources through social media,

Figure 1. The @memetwaluhtv_mans account
https://www.tiktok.com/@memetwaluhtv_mans?_t=8dkWwFMTFyc&_r=1

The accounts mentioned above often peddle themselves by offering themselves to be ordered anything in order to get coins or gifts from their viewers. Currently, the account has 1.1k followers, gets 22.9k likes and follows 1.970k other accounts. When broadcasting live on TikTok, the @memetwaluhtv_mans account always obeys and follows every order from the audience who gives him gifts. He performs various actions, such as dancing pargoy or even injuring himself with a slap according to the number of coins given by the audience. This phenomenon can be classified as a form of digital slavery, which is consistent with Fuchs' view. This view illustrates how digital technology provides space for human exploitation, where they are sold as laborers who submit to digital power, in this case social media TikTok. This practice indicates that power and control over interactions on social media can lead to the exploitation of individuals, with them willing to commit acts that may be detrimental to themselves in order to gain financial support from their audience.

Figure 2. Account @selalusabar00
https://www.tiktok.com/@selalusabar00?_t=8dkYCMS72HK&_r=1

The accounts mentioned above are not too different from the previous accounts which frequently appear on the author's homepage and peddle themselves to the public. This allows anyone to exploit the account user after giving a gift. The account @selalusabar00 has 14.1k followers, gets 12.6k likes and follows 3.675k accounts, despite only having four videos. As seen in the picture, there are two people who broadcast live on TikTok with the aim of getting gifts from their audience. Users of this account often obey and follow orders from viewers who give gifts. For example, they will dance or imitate animal sounds such as chickens or birds singing. This phenomenon shows how individuals willingly carry out their audience's orders to gain financial support, and in the process, they can be exploited by gifted audiences. This practice reflects the power dynamics that exist in social media interactions, where individuals with financial control can leverage their position to influence the actions of others and benefit from it.

Figure 3. Account @arif_mans72
https://www.tiktok.com/@arif_mans72?_t=8dkYJ9O6OuY&_r=1

The image above depicts the @arif_mans72 account which is actively broadcasting live on TikTok with the aim of getting coins or gifts from the audience. What distinguishes this account from previous accounts is that @arif_mans72 is a person with a disability. Not only himself, but he also often does live streaming with other friends with disabilities to ask for financial support from the audience. To date, the account has 191.7K followers, follows 817 other accounts, and has received 2.3M likes.

In practice, there are many terms that are often used to refer to people who give gifts to them. Some examples include "thank you good people", "blessings abound good people", "thank you sultans", "gift lion pargoy nih", and so on. These terms are used as a form of expression of thanks and appreciation to viewers who provide financial support to the account. This phenomenon shows the interaction between viewers and content creators on social media, where people with disabilities use the TikTok platform to get financial support and express their gratitude and appreciation to viewers who have given gifts.

Figure 4. 1M account

A new type of slavery model called "cyber begging style" is shown in the image above. In this model, an account user acts like a conventional beggar. He showed a benevolent face to his audience in order to earn coins which could be exchanged to buy rice. While it is not known for certain whether the account user is truly penniless or not, many viewers have gifted him with coins in response to his appearance. This phenomenon highlights the existence of practices in cyberspace that describe a new model of slavery, where individuals use the emotions and compassion of the audience to get financial support.

Not only that, there are also other accounts that adopt the role of a slave who is ready to be ordered by the audience to get gifts. The "begging" model of this account is far more extreme than the others. For example, he is seen bathing in the river late at night until just before dawn. Through this action, he tries to attract the attention and sympathy of his audience in hopes of obtaining financial support in the form of gifts. This phenomenon reflects a higher level of exploitation, in which the individual intentionally exploits an alarming or extreme situation to gain advantage in cyberspace.

Figure 5. Maseguend account

This account often broadcasts live on TikTok at night until dawn with the aim of getting as many gifts as possible from the audience. Even though many onlookers were angry or displeased with this behavior, the father continued his actions regardless of the concerns of the onlookers who were concerned for his health. This action is considered very dangerous because long soaking in water at night can cause colds or the risk of contracting other diseases. Even so, the father continued to do it almost every night until dawn. This action shows how persistent he is in pursuing financial support through the TikTok platform, even at the expense of his own health and well-being.

Even though there were spectators who did not agree with his actions, there were also spectators who provided support and gifts as a form of appreciation for the actions carried out by the father. This phenomenon reflects the complexity in social media interactions, where one person can ignore the risks and concerns of others in order to gain financial benefit or attention from their audience.

The five accounts mentioned above are actively utilizing the social media platform TikTok to sell themselves and get as many coins or gifts as possible from the audience. They also have a tendency to have multiple accounts as a measure to avoid being banned by TikTok if their actions are deemed to violate the platform's policies. Social media TikTok has become a space for human exploitation in this digital era, where individuals are willing to become digital slaves who are ready to be ordered to do anything to get financial support. This phenomenon is in line with Fuchs' view previously explained, in which digital technology provides space for human exploitation in the form of digital slavery. In this digital era, Social media has succeeded in forming human identities that are very attached to social media activities and are willing to do anything to easily get rewards from the audience. This is in stark contrast to the era of slavery in classical times where slavery was more limited to physical intercourse and more crude control.

In this context, social media TikTok has created a new dynamic in which individuals sacrifice their own privacy, integrity and health to gain recognition, financial support or popularity from their

audience. This illustrates a shift in the dynamics of human exploitation in the digital era, which often occurs through social media and other digital platforms.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion above, the authors conclude First, Fuchs views that digital media has shaped the exploitation and commodification of social media, social media often utilizes data and content generated by users as a source of economic value. In this context, social media users are often unpaid "laborers", as they indirectly contribute to creating value for the platform, but rarely receive equal rewards.

Fuchs also observes how social media operates as part of a capitalist economic system. Social media platforms have control over the information distribution infrastructure, algorithms, and mechanisms, which influence how content is promoted, viewed, and consumed by users. This creates an imbalance of power between platforms and users, with platforms often dictating how work on social media is done

Second, the slavery model that exists on the social media platform TikTok offers a variety of ways by utilizing the Live Streaming feature on their accounts, as previously explained. Actors of this model use a variety of different strategies to beg their audience. Some of them exploit themselves by performing inappropriate acts such as bathing in rivers, singing, and dancing, while others even present themselves with the aim of asking for coins and other gifts from the audience. These practices raise serious concerns about the exploitation and unhealthy use of social media, as it places individuals in adverse situations and can even threaten their emotional and physical integrity. Implications: Slavery is not only through physical touch, but through digital technology.

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