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Voluntary Servitude in Digital Capitalism: A Synthesis of Frommian and Fuchsian Thought on Instagram Influencer Activities

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ABSTRACT

The freedom of Instagram influencers within the structure of platform capitalism represents a structural contradiction that can be examined as voluntary servitude. This study aims to synthesize Erich Fromm's critical psychology and Christian Fuchs's political economy of digital media to explain how structural unfreedom is accepted as a form of autonomy by digital actors. This study uses a qualitative method with a literature research design through a conceptual-critical approach, without direct empirical testing of influencer subjects. The synthesis constructs a theoretical abstraction called the Dialectical Model of Freedom in Digital Capitalism. This model holds that the subject's release from traditional authority yields negative freedom, but not necessarily positive freedom. In the context of achievement society, the post-emergence situation from primary bonds may encourage psychological escape through automaton conformity, which forms the pseudo self. This psychic submission is then converted by platform capitalism into a prosumer commodity through the mechanism of playbour. Aspirational labor, visibility labor, precarious employment, digital Taylorism, visibility game, and shadowbans show that creative autonomy is conditioned by the interests of visibility and value extraction. This study concludes that voluntary servitude should be understood as an analytical category for explaining subjective acceptance of digital exploitation structures. Its implications require digital communication studies to strengthen critical digital literacy, protect digital workers, improve transparency in algorithmic governance, and democratize platform infrastructure.

Keywords: Automaton Conformity; Influencer; Platform Capitalism; Playbour; Pseudo Self.

INTRODUCTION

Influencer freedom within the structure of platform capitalism represents a structural contradiction that requires critical examination. Creative autonomy facilitated by digital infrastructure operates simultaneously with value extraction, self-commodification, and labor precarity. In this article, voluntary servitude is not defined as a legal category or as an empirical generalization about all influencers. The term is positioned as an analytical category to explain the subjective acceptance of structural unfreedom in platform capitalism. Indonesia is an important context because it is part of the Global South, with high levels of social media use and dependence on global platform infrastructure. DataReportal recorded 212 million internet users in Indonesia at the beginning of 2025, with internet penetration reaching 74.6%. In the same period, there were 143 million active social media user identities. Meta's advertising tools also indicated that there were 103 million Instagram users in Indonesia (Kemp, 2025). The influencer marketing structure lists more than 1.1 million Instagram influencers in Indonesia, with approximately 980,000 categorized as nano creators (Taslaud, 2025). These data are not used to test the theoretical model empirically. They are used to demonstrate Indonesia's relevance as a macro-level context for a critical analysis of digital labor.

The changing boundary between leisure activities and productive activities is explained through the literature on digital labor. User participation cannot be understood merely as spontaneous social interaction because, under platform capitalism, such activity can be converted into aspirational labor. This term refers to

aspirational work undertaken to gain future visibility, reputation, and professional opportunities (Duffy, 2017). This mechanism is extended through visibility labor, namely the labor of visibility performed by followers to expand the circulation of advertorial content and strengthen the commercial reach of influencers (Abidin, 2016). In digital creative labor, narratives of enjoyment, authenticity, flexibility, and creative freedom may obscure the precarious nature of employment. This term refers to vulnerable labor characterized by uncertainty, flexible working hours without clear boundaries, and continuous performance pressure (Annisa & Suwanto, 2023). Studies on the gig economy also show that claims of flexibility can function as a legitimizing mechanism for algorithmic control and the shifting of risk onto workers. Such studies are relevant as structural comparisons for explaining broader patterns of platform labor (Asrori et al., 2025).

Examining this contradiction requires a conceptual basis for distinguishing negative from positive freedom. Fromm (1941, 2013) explains that release from traditional external authority may produce negative freedom, but it does not automatically produce positive freedom as the capacity for authentic self-realization. When subjects fail to manage anxiety, isolation, and uncertainty after the release from primary bonds, freedom may turn into existential pressure. In the digital context, this pressure is related to an achievement society, one that frames performance, productivity, and self-optimization as voluntary demands (Han, 2015). Thus, subjects are not always subordinated through explicit external coercion. Subordination may also occur through social and psychological obligations to continuously display success, engagement, and visibility.

The inability to endure existential isolation may encourage an escape from freedom through forms of compliance perceived as a matter of personal choice. Reed and Haas (2025) show a relationship between social media dependence, anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty, and reduced preference for free choice. In this article, these findings are not treated as direct evidence concerning all Instagram influencers. They serve as conceptual support for explaining social media's role as a means of diversion from uncertainty. In Fromm's framework, this escape may operate through automaton conformity, namely a mechanism in which individuals adopt dominant social expectations as if those expectations constituted their authentic selfhood (Fromm, 2013). At the platform level, these dominant expectations manifest in engagement metrics, visibility algorithms, trends, and commercial demands that together form the pseudo self.

This psychodynamic dimension has a direct relationship with political-economic instruments in digital capitalism. The explanation of the internalization of algorithmic authority requires the digital labor theory of value to explain the conversion of social communication, self-expression, and everyday activities into value production for platforms (Fuchs, 2014). Content creators are positioned as prosumers because they

simultaneously consume and produce information, relations, attention, and behavioral data. Use value generated in digital social interaction can become exchange value for corporations through the accumulation of data, attention, and commercial reach. This exploitation is often not represented as forced labor, but as playbour. This term refers to the mixture of play and labor that makes unpaid digital labor perceived as enjoyable self-expression (Fuchs, 2012, 2021).

Previous literature has provided an important basis for understanding platform labor, visibility labor, aspirational labor, algorithmic governance, the political economy of communication, and platform imperialism (Abidin, 2016; Cotter, 2019; Duffy & Meisner, 2023). However, most of these studies have explained the structure of exploitation more extensively than they have positioned the psychodynamic dimension as the primary focus of analysis. Accordingly, the main gap this article addresses is the need to explain why structural unfreedom can be accepted, reproduced, and experienced as freedom by subjects of platform capitalism. This question requires a synthesis of Fromm and Fuchs. Fromm is needed to explain the psychodynamic mechanism of submission, whereas Fuchs is needed to explain the political-economic mechanism of value creation in digital capitalism.

This study aims to synthesize the critical psychology tradition of Erich Fromm with Christian Fuchs's political economy of digital media to examine voluntary servitude in the activities of Instagram influencers. Specifically, this study constructs the Dialectical Model of Freedom in Digital Capitalism as a theoretical abstraction to explain the movement from emancipatory claims to structural contradiction and illusory resolution. This model is not intended as an empirical generalization about all influencers. It is a conceptual device for explaining the relationship between the internalization of algorithmic authority, the formation of the pseudo self, unpaid digital labor, and self-commodification in platform capitalism.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a literature research design. The qualitative approach is used to understand the complexity of meaning, power relations, and social structures that cannot be reduced to quantitative measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study adopts a conceptual-critical approach as its epistemological foundation. The critical paradigm is used to identify power relations embedded in representations of freedom, creativity, flexibility, and digital participation (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Therefore, this study does not use interviews, observations, surveys, or direct empirical testing of influencers. The main objective of this study is to examine the conceptual relations among bodies of literature that explain digital labor, the psychology of freedom, self-commodification, and platform capitalism.

The data used in this study are secondary. The main sources consist of theoretical works that explain negative freedom, positive freedom, escape from freedom, automaton conformity, achievement society, digital labor, prosumer commodity, playbour, aspirational labor, visibility labor, the political economy of communication, and platform imperialism. Supporting sources, including journal articles, digital reports, and normative studies, are used according to their respective functions. Core literature is selected because it has a direct relation to the main theoretical construction, especially Fromm and Fuchs. Supporting literature is selected because it extends the context of platform labor, algorithmic governance, digital labor precarity, social validation on Instagram, and the regulatory implications of the digital sphere. [Kemp \(2025\)](#) and [Taslaud \(2025\)](#) are used as macro-level contextual data for Indonesia, not as empirical evidence for the conceptual model.

The literature inclusion criteria consist of four elements. First, the literature must explain key concepts concerning freedom, psychodynamic compliance, digital labor, and platform commodification. Second, the literature must directly discuss influencers, Instagram, visibility labor, or algorithmic governance. Third, the literature must provide structural comparisons regarding platform labor, especially in the contexts of the gig economy, creative workers, digital subordination, and labor precarity. Fourth, the literature must support normative implications concerning the protection of digital workers, mental health, privacy, and digital-space governance. The exclusion criteria include literature that has no direct relevance to digital labor, platform capitalism, or the psychodynamic dimension of freedom.

Data collection was carried out through documentation and literature study. The search was conducted selectively to ensure conceptual depth and adequate representation of the theoretical positions required in the article ([Patton, 2014](#)). The collected literature was then classified into four functions: the main theoretical foundation, core academic dialogue, macro-level context, and normative implications. This functional classification is important to ensure that each reference is used according to its evidentiary capacity. Accordingly, literature on the gig economy, ride-hailing, workers' mental health, and legal certainty in the digital sphere is not used as direct evidence about all Instagram influencers. Such literature is used for comparison, extension, or as a normative consequence of platform labor patterns.

Data analysis was conducted through critical reading, conceptual reconstruction, and theoretical synthesis. Critical reading is used to examine the construction of the ideology of digital freedom, participation, and creativity in the literature on platform capitalism. The principle of critical narrative reading helps assess the representation of power relations and structures of domination in texts ([Riessman, 2007](#)). Conceptual reconstruction was conducted by reorganizing Fromm's concepts of freedom and automaton conformity within the context of digital labor. Theoretical synthesis then connected this psychodynamic mechanism to Fuchs's digital labor theory of value,

concerning prosumer commodities, alienation, appropriation, and playbour. The final result of the analysis is an abstraction of a dialectical conceptual model, not an observational generalization.

The validity of the argument in this study is not measured by empirical evidence but by conceptual coherence. The validity parameters include consistency in terminology, accuracy in inter-theoretical relations, coherence between method and findings, and the model's capacity to explain the contradiction of freedom in digital capitalism. Thus, the scientific validity offered is not a universal factual claim about all influencers. It is an analytical capacity to explain the relationships among freedom, compliance, self-commodification, and value extraction within platform structures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Automaton Conformity and the Internalization of Algorithmic Authority in Instagram Influencer Labor

The existence of Instagram influencers in this article is positioned as a theoretical subject for analyzing the anomaly of digital freedom. Release from traditional work authority produces negative freedom because the subject is no longer located within a direct command structure, fixed working hours, or visible managerial supervision. However, this negative freedom does not automatically produce positive freedom. [Fromm \(2013\)](#) explains that release from primary bonds may generate anxiety and existential isolation when individuals fail to realize authentic autonomy. In the context of influencers, the freedom to present oneself, choose working hours, and build an audience can become a source of pressure because the subject must continuously prove their existence through digital performance.

This situation relates to the achievement society as explained by [Han \(2015\)](#). In this order, repression does not always appear as external prohibition, but as a positive drive to continue achieving, producing, being visible, and exceeding previous achievements. Influencers are not always directly commanded by conventional superiors, but they face demands to optimize metrics, maintain interaction, follow trends, and manage a public persona. Algorithms are not understood as a form of power that totally determines all actions. They are understood as structures that condition patterns of action, provide incentives, limit the distribution of visibility, and shape creative orientation. Thus, algorithmic authority operates through rewards, uncertainty, and the management of attention.

The post-release situation under traditional authority may lead to a loss of freedom. [Reed and Haas \(2025\)](#) show that social media dependence is related to anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty, and reduced preference for free choice. In the conceptual reading of this article, these findings help explain that social media may function as a means of diversion from uncertainty. Subjects who need validation

and certainty may more easily accept platform feedback as a behavioral guide. In the context of Instagram, this feedback appears through the number of likes, comments, views, shares, reach, and engagement rate, which shapes perceptions of social recognition.

This escape mechanism can be explained through automaton conformity. [Fromm \(2013\)](#) explains that individuals who cannot maintain authentic selfhood tend to adopt a personality approved by the social environment as their true selfhood. In platform capitalism, this social environment consists not only of humans, but also of algorithmic systems, markets, brands, audiences, and trends. Nano and micro influencers may internalize indicators of social acceptance from their closest communities. Mid-tier and macro influencers may internalize the logic of brand partnerships. Large-scale influencers may internalize the pressure to manage a public persona continuously. These scale differences are not intended as fixed empirical classifications. They are conceptual illustrations of variations in the content of conformity. The basic structure remains the same: the replacement of authentic spontaneity with the pseudo-self formed by social and algorithmic expectations.

This domination does not operate as overt coercion. It often appears as a representation of autonomy. [Annisa and Suwanto \(2023\)](#) show that digital creative workers are often situated in vulnerable conditions accompanied by claims of enjoyment, pride, and passion. [Asrori et al. \(2025\)](#) also show that flexibility in platform labor can function as a legitimizing mechanism for algorithmic control and risk shifting. These two studies serve as structural comparisons, showing that digital labor often presents itself as freedom at the formal level but entails pressure and subordination at the operational level. In this regard, influencers may be understood as free subjects because they lack direct superiors, yet their creative activities remain conditioned by the platform's incentive structures.

This condition can be seen in the visibility game. [Cotter \(2019\)](#) explains that influencers and algorithms interact in a visibility game, namely, a process in which digital actors seek to understand platform rules to remain visible and relevant. It is important to emphasize that algorithms structure behavior, but they do not always determine all user actions. Therefore, the internalization of algorithmic authority must be understood as an asymmetrical negotiation process. Influencers still have agency capacity, but this capacity is limited by visibility uncertainty, metric logic, and the need to maintain audience engagement. Creative autonomy does not disappear entirely, but undergoes structural reduction.

This reduction of autonomy is reinforced by platform governance that is not always transparent. [Duffy and Meisner \(2023\)](#) show that social media creators experience tension between visibility and content invisibility, including through experiences of shadowbans and self-censorship. In this article, shadowbans

are understood as an example of asymmetrical governance that can encourage creators to make adjustments before explicit sanctions occur. The threat of reduced visibility distribution has psychological significance because creators' digital existence depends on being visible. Therefore, compliance does not always arise from direct coercion, but from the anticipation of the risk of invisibility.

Digital metrics can also form a hierarchy of self-validation. [Fitria et al. \(2026\)](#) show that self-representation on Instagram can be related to external validation through quantitative appreciation. This finding is used only in a limited way as conceptual support for the role of metrics as indicators of social validation, not as general empirical evidence for all influencers. Likes, comments, and engagement figures may serve as the basis for assessing recognition, self-worth, and social relevance. Thus, the pseudo self is formed not only by commercial strategy, but also by the affective need for recognition in the digital social hierarchy. At this point, psychological compliance begins to connect with political-economic mechanisms because a persona that obtains validation through metrics can be converted into commercial value.

B. Self-Commodification and Value Extraction in Instagram Influencer Digital Labor

The analysis of automaton conformity is insufficient if it remains limited to the psychological dimension. The pseudo self, formed through metrics, visibility, and social validation, must be explained in relation to the extraction of economic value. Under platform capitalism, self-expression, social interaction, audience attention, and behavioral data can be converted into commodities. Therefore, a digital labor theory of value is needed to explain the mechanism through which psychodynamic compliance is absorbed into the structure of capital accumulation. [Fuchs \(2014\)](#) provides a basis for understanding that digital communication activities can become part of capitalist production when data, attention, and user interaction are used as sources of economic value.

The intersection between Fromm and Fuchs lies in their shared analysis of the relationship between psychological submission and economic accumulation. Fromm explains the acceptance of external demands as part of the subject's own will. Fuchs explains the transformation of this acceptance into digital labor that generates value for platforms. On Instagram, creators do not merely produce content for self-expression. They also produce behavioral data, public attention, audience relations, and potential commercial transactions. Psychic autonomy, when subjected to metric logic, becomes an initial mechanism that enables platforms to extract value.

[Fuchs \(2014\)](#) explains that corporate social media extract value from prosumers through ideological coercion, alienation, and appropriation. A prosumer is a subject who simultaneously produces and consumes information. In influencer

labor, this position is evident in content production, audience interaction, use of platform features, and involvement in commercial campaigns. Content perceived as self-expression can become a unit of labor. Social relations perceived as personal communication can also be transformed into economic assets. Thus, the digital persona of influencers can be understood as a prosumer commodity optimized for platform interests.

This mechanism of exploitation is often obscured through playbour. Fuchs (2012, 2021) shows that digital labor can be perceived as an enjoyable activity because it is integrated with entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. In this situation, the boundaries among work, play, identity formation, and the maintenance of social networks become blurred. Influencers may feel they are realizing themselves while also generating economic value for platforms and advertisers. At this point, the escape from freedom in Fromm's framework is related to Fuchs's theory of digital labor. A sense of security, recognition, and enjoyment may reduce resistance to exploitation by framing unpaid digital labor as part of everyday life. The conceptual synthesis between automaton conformity and digital labor theory of value can be mapped as follows.

Table 1. The Fromm-Fuchs Synthesis: Mapping Automaton Conformity onto Digital Labor Theory

Frommian Concept (Fromm, 2013)	Function in Fromm's Framework	Digital Labor Counterpart (Fuchs, 2012, 2014)	Synthetic Proposition
Negative freedom	Release from external restrictions that may produce existential isolation and anxiety.	Entering platforms as an alternative to traditional work, the gig economy, or creator labor.	Platform capitalism offers negative freedom but limits the realization of positive freedom by relying on digital infrastructure.
Automaton conformity	Individuals adopt a personality approved by the social environment as if it were authentic selfhood.	Platform ideology, the logic of sharing, engagement, and algorithmic rewards form the orientation of digital identity.	Algorithmic preferences can be internalized as creative identity, so that algorithms function as cultural patterns that are not always visible.
Pseudo self	The self is represented as a role adjusted to social expectations, so thoughts and feelings may become pseudo.	Alienation from one's own digital products, data, persona, and social relations capitalized by platforms.	The public persona of influencers becomes a prosumer commodity curated and optimized for platforms.
Escape from the burden of positive freedom.	Relief from isolation through conformity, but at the expense of authentic individuality.	Playbour makes exploitation appear to be self-expression, entertainment, and enjoyment.	The feeling of freedom can coexist with structural limitations and value extraction.
Social character	A psychic structure that channels individual energy into forms required by the social order.	Appropriation of value by platforms; risks are borne by individuals, while value is accumulated by corporations.	Digital social character is shaped so that subjects continuously produce attention, data, and surplus value.

Source: Author's Analysis, 2026.

This mapping shows that the psychic dimension of the subject can be converted into an economic instrument. The pseudo self formed through demands for visibility is not limited to a psychological phenomenon. It becomes part of the production of prosumer commodities. [Duffy \(2017\)](#) defines aspirational labor as work performed voluntarily, often without direct wages, to gain future visibility, reputation, and opportunities. In the Fromm-Fuchs reading, aspirational labor shows how the search for security through social roles can shift into digital labor that is not always compensated equally.

This commodification operates not only on the creator's self but also on the surrounding network of social relations. [Abidin \(2016\)](#) explains visibility labor as labor performed to build visibility and attention within the influencer ecosystem. Followers, audiences, and communities do not merely receive messages. They also expand content circulation, strengthen engagement, and increase commercial value. Accordingly, value appropriation is not limited to the creator's digital representation but also encompasses the relationships among creators, followers, and platforms.

At the macro level, this process can be explained through the political economy of communication. [Mosco \(2009\)](#) explains commodification, spatialization, and structuration as instruments for understanding the organization of communication within capitalist power relations. Spatialization enables communication technologies to reduce geographical boundaries and expand market accumulation. [Smythe \(1977\)](#) provides a historical basis through the concept of audience commodity, namely audience attention as a commodity sold to advertisers. In the digital context, this logic expands because attention, behavioral data, interaction, and user persona can be calculated, mined, and traded more intensively.

This domination can also be explained through platform imperialism. [Jin \(2015\)](#) explains that global digital power operates not only through physical ownership but also through control over applications, operating systems, data, and platform infrastructure. In the context of Indonesia as part of the Global South, this reading shows inequality between local users and creators, on the one hand, and global platform corporations, on the other. Meta Platforms Inc., as the owner of Instagram, derives economic value from users' and creators' activities. Meanwhile, control over infrastructure, algorithmic logic, and capital accumulation remains concentrated within the corporation. Thus, the Indonesian context is important not because this article tests all Indonesian influencers, but because this context demonstrates the relevance of the political economy of global platforms to digital labor in the Global South.

Commodification may also operate through cultural practices. [Hendra et al. \(2025\)](#) show that cultural practices can be negotiated within the structure of global consumption and commodification. This reference is used as a conceptual

extension, not as direct evidence about influencers. It helps explain how platform capitalism processes not only data and attention but also cultural expression, lifestyles, identities, and social symbols through market mechanisms. In influencer labor, identity and self-representation become part of the commodification process because the persona presented on platforms has both symbolic and economic value.

Platform labor conditions also have legal and institutional consequences. [Fransisco et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Mariyam et al. \(2025\)](#) are not used as direct evidence about Instagram influencers. These two references are used as legal-critical comparisons concerning how platforms can shift risks to individuals through unequal labor relations. These studies show that digital subordination can be embedded in forms of relations represented as autonomous. In this article, that reading is used to strengthen the argument that platform labor often obscures control, risk, and responsibility through narratives of partnership, flexibility, or freedom.

[Kemp \(2025\)](#) and [Taslaud \(2025\)](#) are positioned as macro-level context. The number of internet users, social media users, Instagram users, and nano creators does not directly prove the existence of automaton conformity or playbour. However, these data show that the phenomenon under analysis occurs within a large-scale digital communication context of high economic value. Thus, statistical data strengthen the urgency of the analysis, but do not replace theoretical substantiation. The main validity of this article remains grounded in the coherence of the Fromm-Fuchs synthesis in its explanation of the relationship between psychodynamic compliance and political-economic extraction.

C. The Dialectical Model of Freedom in Digital Capitalism: From Emancipatory Claim to Illusory Resolution

The Fromm-Fuchs synthesis in this article is formulated through the Dialectical Model of Freedom in Digital Capitalism. This model is a conceptual abstraction for analyzing the relationship between influencers and platform capitalism across three phases: emancipatory claim, structural contradiction, and illusory resolution. This model is not intended as an empirical generalization about all influencers. It is used as an analytical tool to explain the transformation of digital freedom into the subjective acceptance of exploitative structures.

The first phase is the emancipatory claim. Platform capitalism offers negative freedom in the form of spatial and temporal flexibility, the absence of traditional superiors, opportunities to build an audience, and the possibility of earning income from creative activities. Instagram represents creator labor as a means of self-expression, social relations, and personal entrepreneurship. Formally, the platform offers the possibility of freeing subjects from hierarchical industrial labor. This phase is important because the freedom offered is not entirely artificial.

a structural reduction because subjects must adjust their self-expression to the platform's needs. At this stage, Fromm's theory of automaton conformity is related to Fuchs's theory of the prosumer commodity.

This structural contradiction shows that every upload, Instagram Stories post, Instagram Reels post, interaction, and persona performance can have two simultaneous functions. Such activities function as creative expression and as units of digital labor that generate attention, data, and economic value. [Annisa and Suwanto \(2023\)](#) help explain the precarity of creative workers within narratives of passion, whereas [Asrori et al. \(2025\)](#) provide a structural comparison concerning the illusion of flexibility in platform labor. These two references show that freedom on digital platforms cannot be assessed only from the absence of direct superiors. This freedom must be analyzed through relations of control, risk, and dependence on systems.

The third phase is illusory resolution. In this phase, structural unfreedom is not always rejected by subjects because it operates together with affective, social, and economic rewards. Likes, comments, views, follower growth, collaboration offers, and public recognition can make compliance with metrics perceived as personal success. Automaton conformity forms the pseudo self that aligns with algorithmic expectations, while playbour makes unpaid digital labor or excessive labor perceived as an enjoyable activity. In this phase, voluntary servitude becomes an analytical category that explains the acceptance of exploitation, not because the subject lacks will, but because that will is conditioned by platform structures.

This model also explains why domination in digital capitalism does not always require repressive coercion. [Han \(2015\)](#) shows the shift from a disciplinary society to an achievement society, in which subjects subordinate themselves to performance demands. [Fuchs \(2014\)](#) shows that digital labor generates value for corporations through the commodification of user activity. When these two readings are synthesized, platform capitalism can be understood as operating through the relationship between psychic discipline and economic extraction. The subject feels that they are working for themselves, while the platform structure obtains value from the labor, data, attention, and social relations produced.

The normative implication of this model lies in the need to formulate an emancipatory agenda. [Tan et al. \(2026\)](#) highlight the importance of legal certainty, privacy, and digital space governance. [Almufarrida and Malie \(2025\)](#) emphasize the urgency of protecting workers' mental health amid modern labor-related risks. These two references are used as a basis for normative implications, not as direct evidence about influencer experiences. Within the framework of this article, voluntary servitude on digital platforms requires attention to the mental health of digital workers, including Instagram influencers, algorithmic transparency, digital worker protection, and the accountability of platform corporations.

The direction for strengthening digital autonomy outlined in this article comprises two paths. First, critical consciousness is needed to explain how representations of digital freedom, technological fetishism, and the internalization of algorithmic authority operate. This consciousness is important so that influencers and platform users do not equate compliance with metrics with authentic freedom. Second, platform democratization is required so that digital infrastructure is not entirely conditioned by the logic of commodification and capital accumulation. [Fuchs \(2020\)](#) provides a basis for positioning communication critique as part of efforts to identify domination and to formulate a more democratic communication structure. Thus, this model does not only explain precarity. It also offers a basis for strengthening digital autonomy.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that voluntary servitude in digital capitalism can be understood as the result of the relationship between psychodynamic compliance and political-economic commodification. Through the synthesis of Fromm and Fuchs, this article shows that the freedom of Instagram influencers cannot be understood only as creative autonomy, temporal flexibility, or economic opportunity. This freedom must be analyzed dialectically because release from traditional work authority can operate alongside new dependence on algorithms, metrics, visibility, and the logic of self-commercialization.

The Dialectical Model of Freedom in Digital Capitalism formulated in this study explains three main phases. The first phase is the emancipatory claim, namely the presence of negative freedom in the form of flexibility, the absence of direct superiors, opportunities to build an audience, and means of self-expression. The second phase is structural contradiction, namely the condition in which creative expression must submit to metric optimization and the conversion of the self into a prosumer commodity. The third phase is illusory resolution, namely the condition in which structural unfreedom is perceived as freedom because it is accompanied by affective, social, and economic rewards. In this final phase, automaton conformity and playbour operate simultaneously. The pseudo self is formed by algorithmic expectations, while unpaid digital labor is perceived as enjoyable self-expression.

The main contribution of this article lies in positioning the psychodynamic dimension as the primary focus in the study of digital labor. The literature on aspirational labor, visibility labor, algorithmic governance, precarious employment, digital Taylorism, and platform capitalism has extensively explained the structure of exploitation. However, the Fromm-Fuchs synthesis adds an explanation of why such exploitation can be accepted and perceived as freedom by digital subjects. Thus, this article explains platforms not only as political-economic structures but also as structures that form the pseudo self, reinforce compliance through affective rewards, and internalize authority that is not always visible.

This study has a limitation because it does not conduct empirical testing of influencers' direct experiences. Therefore, the resulting model should be understood as a conceptual construction, not as a representative generalization. Future research can test this model through in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, content analysis, or comparative studies across platforms. Such empirical testing is important for understanding the concrete experiences of influencers across different audience scales, content types, and economic positions regarding automaton conformity, playbour, shadowbans, the visibility game, and metric validation.

At the academic level, communication and digital media studies need to strengthen critical digital literacy regarding platform capitalism. This literacy is not limited to technical competence in using social media. Critical digital literacy must also include an understanding of algorithms, data extraction, commodification of attention, and the formation of the pseudo self. At the practical level, policymakers need to encourage transparency in algorithmic governance, protection of digital workers' mental health, clarity regarding the status and rights of content creators, and mechanisms for platform accountability. The democratization of digital infrastructure is an important agenda so that freedom on digital platforms does not remain an illusory resolution conditioned by the logic of self-commodification.

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