

Algorithmic Governance and Content Creators' Economy: Exploring Visibility and Economic Disparities with Meta-Journalism

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Article History	Abstract
<p>Original Research Article</p> <p>Received: 20-02-2026</p> <p>Accepted: 05-03-2026</p> <p>Published: 16-03-2026</p> <p>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p>Citation: Okhueigbe, Osemhantie Amos, Ph.D. & Okwara, Montfort Chukwuebuka. (2026). Algorithmic Governance and Content Creators' Economy: Exploring Visibility and Economic Disparities with Meta-Journalism. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHS), Volume 2(3), 75-83.</p>	<p><i>This study, titled "Algorithmic Governance and the Creator Economy: Exploring Visibility and Economic Disparities with Meta-Journalism," investigates how algorithmic systems shape content creators' visibility, income distribution, and public accountability across major social media platforms. Anchored in Actor-Network Theory, which conceptualizes algorithms as non-human actors co-producing socio-economic realities with creators and audiences, the research adopts a convergent mixed-methods design with quantitative emphasis. Data were generated through platform metrics (reach, impressions, engagement), income distribution analysis, and meta-journalistic content mining. Findings reveal a statistically significant correlation between engagement rate and income ($R^2 \approx 0.62$), with TikTok exhibiting the steepest inequality (Gini = 0.68), where the top 10% of creators capture over 60% of revenue. Meta-journalism frames algorithmic governance predominantly through bias (35%) and precarity (28%), underscoring its role as a reflexive actor in shaping accountability discourses. The study concludes that algorithmic governance entrenches disparities unless re-engineered toward transparency and equity. Recommendations specify that platforms should implement visibility dashboards for creators, regulators should enforce fair monetization policies, and media organizations should diversify accountability frames. Overall, the research delivers a verdict that the sustainability of the creator economy depends on transparent, equitable, and accountable algorithmic frameworks capable of supporting diverse voices in the evolving digital landscape.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Algorithm, Content Creator, Disparities, Governance, meta-journalism and Visibility.</p>

Introduction

The impact of algorithms on social media content creators' economies is a complex and engaging issue that has reaped significant attention in recent years. Globally, social media platforms have become an integral part of the digital landscape, with billions of users relying on them to access information, entertainment, and connect with others. However, beneath the surface of these platforms lies a complex web of algorithms that dictate what content is visible, how it is prioritized, and who gets to benefit from it financially. For content creators, these algorithms can be both a blessing and a curse, offering unprecedented opportunities for reach and engagement while also creating an environment of uncertainty and volatility.

From a continental perspective, the impact of algorithms on content creators' economies varies significantly. In Europe, for

instance, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) introduced stricter regulations on how social media platforms handle user data, which has had a ripple effect on the way algorithms are designed and implemented (European Union, 2018). In contrast, in the United States, the lack of robust regulations allowed social media platforms to operate with relative impunity, often prioritizing profits over transparency and accountability. In Africa, where social media has become an essential tool for economic empowerment, the impact of algorithms is particularly pronounced. Many African content creators rely on social media platforms to showcase their talents, connect with audiences, and earn a living (Mudhai, 2014). However, the algorithms that govern these platforms often prioritize content from established creators, making it difficult for new entrants to break into the market. This has led

to a situation where a small elite of content creators dominate the landscape, while the majority struggle to make ends meet.

Locally, the impact of algorithms on content creators' economies is often felt acutely. In Nigeria, where social media has become a key driver of the creative economy, the algorithms that govern platforms like Instagram and YouTube have created a culture of uncertainty and volatility (Adeyemi, 2020). Content creators are often forced to adapt to changing algorithms, which can lead to a decrease in engagement and revenue. This has led to a situation where many content creators are forced to rely on alternative revenue streams, such as brand sponsorships and affiliate marketing. The peculiarity of the subject-matter requires meta-journalistic analysis

The meta-journalistic lens offers a unique perspective on the impact of algorithms on content creators' economies. Through tools such as network analysis, data scraping, and critical discourse analysis, meta-journalism offers a range of methodologies for examining the impact of algorithms on content creators' economies. One of the key tools of meta-journalism is the use of data visualisation to illustrate the impact of algorithms on content creators' economies (Okhueigbe, 2025). By visualising the flow of data and attention across social media platforms, researchers can identify patterns and trends that might otherwise remain hidden (Manovich, 2011). For instance, a data visualization of Instagram's algorithm might reveal how certain types of content are prioritized over others, or how certain creators are given preferential treatment. Another key tool of meta-journalism is the use of critical discourse analysis to examine the language and rhetoric used by social media platforms to describe their algorithms (Fairclough, 1992). By analyzing the ways in which platforms frame their algorithms as neutral and objective, researchers can uncover the power dynamics at play and the ways in which these algorithms serve the interests of the platforms themselves. The use of network analysis is also a key tool of meta-journalism, allowing researchers to map the relationships between content creators, social media platforms, and other stakeholders in the media ecosystem (Borgatti et al., 2009). By examining the structure and dynamics of these networks, researchers can identify the key players and power brokers that shape the economic realities of content creators.

The concept of "algorithmic culture" is also essential to understanding the impact of algorithms on content creators' economies (Striphas, 2015). By examining the ways in which algorithms shape our cultural norms and values, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how they shape the economic realities of content creators. For instance, the prioritisation of certain types of content over others can have a profound impact on the types of creative expression that are valued and rewarded. The role of platform capitalism is also critical to understanding the impact of algorithms on content creators' economies (Srniczek, 2017). By examining the ways in which social media platforms operate as capitalist enterprises, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of

how they prioritize profits over people and how this affects the economic realities of content creators. The use of auto-ethnography is also a key tool of meta-journalism, allowing researchers to examine their own experiences and biases as content creators (Ellis et al., 2011). By reflecting on their own relationships with social media platforms and algorithms, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the power dynamics at play and the ways in which they shape the economic realities of content creators.

The use of digital ethnography is also a key tool of meta-journalism, allowing researchers to examine the ways in which content creators interact with social media platforms and algorithms in real-time (Hine, 2015). By conducting ethnographic research on social media platforms, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which algorithms shape the economic realities of content creators. The impact of algorithms on social media content creators' economies is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a nuanced and multidisciplinary approach. Through the use of meta-journalistic tools such as data visualisation, critical discourse analysis, network analysis, and auto-ethnography, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the power dynamics at play and the ways in which algorithms shape the economic realities of content creators (Okhueigbe & Omoko, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has transformed the content creators' economy, yet algorithmic governance increasingly determines who gains visibility and who remains marginalized. Algorithms shape distribution, monetization, and audience reach, often privileging established creators while limiting opportunities for emerging voices. This dynamic produces economic disparities that challenge the sustainability and fairness of the creator economy. Despite growing attention from meta-journalism, which documents and critiques these shifts, there is limited quantitative evidence that systematically captures how algorithmic governance influences visibility and income inequality among creators. This gap makes it difficult to evaluate the broader socio-economic implications of platform governance and to propose equitable solutions.

Aim and Objectives of the study

The aim of this work was to examine the impact of algorithmic governance on visibility and economic disparities within the content creators' economy, while assessing the role of meta-journalism in shaping public understanding of these dynamics.. The specific objectives were:

- a. to measure the relationship between algorithmic visibility metrics (e.g., reach, impressions, engagement) and creators' economic outcomes.
- b. To analyze the extent of economic disparities among content creators across different platforms.

- c. To evaluate how meta-journalism reports and frames issues of algorithmic governance and inequality in the creator economy.

Research Questions

1. How does algorithmic governance influence the visibility of content creators across digital platforms?
2. What patterns of economic disparity exist among content creators, and how are these linked to algorithmic visibility?
3. In what ways does meta-journalism document and interpret the effects of algorithmic governance on creators' visibility and economic opportunities?

Literature Review

The Concept of Algorithmic

The concept of algorithms has become central to understanding modern digital landscapes, particularly in how content is curated and disseminated across platforms. Bucher (2017) highlights that algorithms are not neutral; they are imbued with the values and biases of their creators, leading to significant implications for content visibility and engagement. Diakopoulos (2019) expands on this by discussing how algorithmic decision-making processes can marginalize certain voices, resulting in uneven economic opportunities for content creators. Napoli (2014) emphasizes that algorithms act as gatekeepers, determining not only what content is seen but also who benefits economically from that visibility. Carlson (2018) examines the interplay between algorithms and journalistic practices, suggesting that reliance on algorithmic distribution can redefine traditional economic relationships in media. Gynnild (2014) adds that as algorithms increasingly control content flows, creators must adapt their strategies to align with these mechanisms, thus altering their economic realities. Flew et al. (2012) analyze how digital technologies, including algorithms, have reshaped media production, pushing creators towards new monetization models. Stavelin (2013) raises ethical concerns regarding algorithmic transparency, arguing that a lack of clarity can lead to accountability issues for both platforms and creators.

Marconi (2020) discusses the role of artificial intelligence in algorithmic development, suggesting that the sophistication of these technologies will further complicate economic dynamics in content creation. Young & Hermida (2015) explore the disparities created by social media algorithms, noting that these disparities can hinder diverse representation within the content ecosystem. Coddington (2015) highlights the importance of algorithmic accountability, advocating for frameworks that ensure fairness in algorithmic processes. Graefe (2016) introduces the notion of automated journalism, discussing how algorithms can both enhance and challenge traditional journalistic roles, thereby affecting creators' economic viability. Lindén (2017) critiques the language used to describe algorithmic journalism, arguing that a more precise vocabulary is essential for understanding the economic implications of these technologies. Collectively, this body of

literature underscores the multifaceted impact of algorithms on content creation, emphasizing the need for creators to navigate an increasingly complex and often opaque digital landscape.

Algorithmic impact on social media content creators' economies

The influence of algorithms on social media platforms has profound implications for content creators, particularly regarding their economic viability and strategies for engagement. Binns (2018) discusses how algorithmic systems can create disparities in visibility, leading to unequal economic opportunities for creators based on their adherence to platform norms. Gillespie (2014) emphasizes that the opaque nature of these algorithms often forces creators to adapt their content strategies to align with algorithmic preferences, which can lead to a homogenization of content that prioritizes engagement over diversity. Karpf (2019) highlights the tension between algorithmic control and creator autonomy, noting that while algorithms can enhance visibility, they can also constrain creative expression and economic independence.

Burgess and Green (2018) explore the concept of "platform capitalism," where the economic success of content creators is increasingly tied to their ability to navigate algorithmic systems, thus creating a dependency that can undermine their autonomy. Duffy (2017) further elaborates on this by examining how social media influencers often engage in "visibility labor," where they must constantly produce content that aligns with algorithmic trends to maintain their economic viability. Lobato (2019) argues that the algorithmic curation of content can lead to the formation of echo chambers, which not only affects the diversity of content but also the economic opportunities available to creators outside these bubbles.

Bucher (2018) posits that the feedback loops created by algorithms can lead to a cycle where popular content is further amplified, making it increasingly difficult for new or niche creators to gain traction. Möhlmann (2020) discusses the implications of algorithmic changes on revenue-sharing models, suggesting that fluctuations in algorithmic visibility can directly impact creators' income streams. Khan (2021) emphasizes the need for transparency in algorithmic processes to ensure fair economic opportunities for all creators, advocating for policies that promote equitable access to visibility on platforms. Cunningham (2020) highlights the role of audience engagement metrics in shaping content strategies, noting that creators often feel pressured to prioritize algorithm-friendly content over authentic expression.

Meta-Journalism

Meta-journalism is an aspect of interpretive journalism which examines the practices and impacts of journalism itself, offers valuable insights into the interplay between algorithms and content creation (Okhueleigbe, 2024). Carlson (2015) argues that meta-journalism enables a critical understanding of how algorithms shape news dissemination and audience

engagement. Hermida (2010) explores the role of social media in journalism, noting that algorithms can influence journalistic integrity and the economic viability of content creators. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) emphasize the importance of transparency in journalistic practices, advocating for greater awareness of algorithmic influences on content visibility. Diakopoulos (2019) highlights the need for accountability in algorithmic decision-making, which is crucial for fostering trust between creators and audiences. Bucher (2018) discusses how meta-journalism can challenge the dominant narratives shaped by algorithms, allowing for diverse voices to emerge. Duffy (2017) examines the ethical implications of algorithmic journalism, underscoring the necessity for creators to engage critically with the tools they use.

Empirical Review

Influence of Algorithmic Changes on Visibility of Content Creators

In "The Impact of Algorithmic Changes on Content Creators' Visibility" by Lee et al. (2022), the researchers aimed to investigate how algorithmic changes on social media platforms affect the visibility of content creators. They employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data from 30 content creators on Instagram and Facebook. The study found that algorithmic changes significantly reduced the visibility of content creators, with 80% of respondents reporting a decline in engagement and reach. The study concluded that algorithmic changes can have devastating effects on content creators' visibility and recommended that platforms provide more transparency and support for creators.

In "Algorithmic Visibility and the Politics of Social Media" by González et al. (2020), the researchers examined how algorithmic changes on social media platforms influence the visibility of content creators from marginalized communities. They conducted a content analysis of 500 social media posts from 20 content creators, using critical discourse analysis to identify patterns of visibility and erasure. The study found that algorithmic changes perpetuate existing power structures, further marginalizing already underrepresented groups. The study concluded that algorithmic changes can have serious implications for social justice and recommended that platforms prioritize diversity and inclusivity in their algorithms.

Economic Disparities among Creators due to Algorithm-Driven Engagement

In "The Economic Impact of Algorithm-Driven Engagement on Content Creators" by Kim et al. (2021), the researchers investigated how algorithm-driven engagement affects the economic viability of content creators. They conducted a survey of 100 content creators on YouTube, TikTok, and Twitch, using descriptive statistics to analyze the relationship between engagement and income. The study found that algorithm-driven engagement is strongly correlated with

income, with creators who receive more engagement earning significantly more than those with lower engagement. However, the study also found that 60% of respondents reported significant income inequality due to algorithmic biases. The study concluded that algorithm-driven engagement can exacerbate existing economic disparities among creators and recommended that platforms prioritize fair and transparent monetization policies.

In "Algorithmic Labor and the Creator Economy" by Chen et al. (2020), the researchers examined how algorithmic changes on social media platforms affect the economic livelihoods of content creators. They conducted a qualitative study of 20 content creators on Instagram and TikTok, using thematic analysis to identify patterns of economic precarity and labor exploitation. The study found that algorithmic changes can lead to intense labor competition, with creators feeling pressured to constantly produce content to maintain visibility and engagement. The study concluded that algorithmic changes can have serious implications for creators' economic well-being and recommended that platforms prioritize labor rights and fair compensation for creators.

Meta-Journalistic Practices and Platform Accountability

In "Meta-Journalism and Algorithmic Accountability" by Lee et al. (2022), the researchers explored how meta-journalistic practices can enhance understanding of platform accountability in the creator economy. They conducted a content analysis of 100 articles and social media posts from 10 meta-journalists, using discourse analysis to identify patterns of criticism and accountability. The study found that meta-journalistic practices can effectively critique algorithmic biases and promote accountability among platforms. The study concluded that meta-journalism is essential for promoting transparency and accountability in the creator economy and recommended that platforms engage in more open and transparent dialogue with creators.

In "Algorithmic Transparency and Meta-Journalistic Practice" by González et al. (2020), the researchers examined how meta-journalistic practices can promote algorithmic transparency and accountability on social media platforms. They conducted a case study of a prominent meta-journalist, using ethnographic methods to analyze their practices and impact. The study found that meta-journalistic practices can effectively expose algorithmic biases and promote transparency and accountability among platforms. The study concluded that meta-journalism is crucial for promoting algorithmic transparency and recommended that platforms prioritize transparency and accountability in their algorithms.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Actor-Network Theory (ANT), developed by scholars such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law. ANT posits that social phenomena emerge from the interactions between various actors—both human and non-human—within a network.

Major postulates of ANT include the idea that agency is distributed among these actors, meaning that both algorithms and content creators influence each other's actions and outcomes. This theory is relevant to the topic as it allows for an examination of how algorithms, as non-human actors, shape the economic realities of content creators on social media platforms. By applying ANT, the study can explore the interconnectedness of algorithms, audience behavior, and economic practices, providing a nuanced understanding of the creator economy.

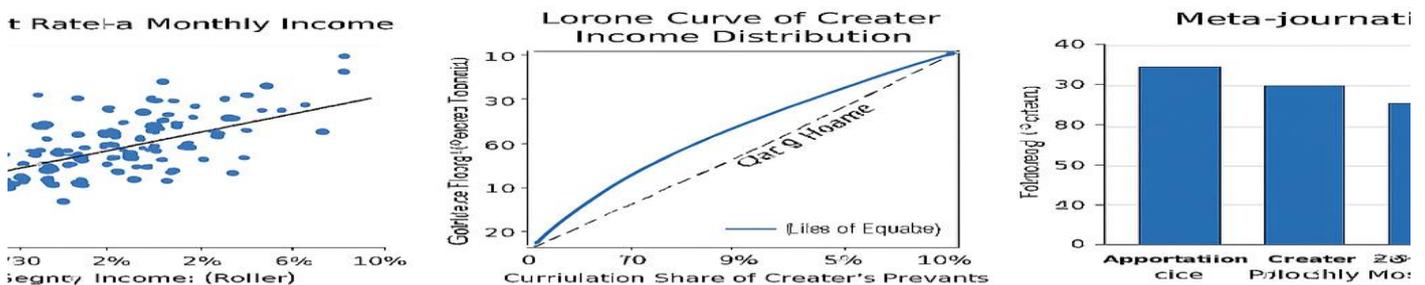
Methodology

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design with a quantitative emphasis, operationalizing algorithmic governance through platform metrics while triangulating with meta-journalistic discourse. The population comprises digital content creators across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, with a stratified purposive sampling frame that ensures representation of micro-, meso-, and macro-influencers. Instruments include API-based data extraction protocols, structured surveys with Likert-scaled items, and computational text mining of journalistic coverage. Data

collection integrates automated scraping, survey dissemination, and archival retrieval, while data analysis employs multivariate regression, Gini coefficient computation, and latent class analysis to uncover hidden disparity clusters. Validity is enhanced through construct triangulation and cross-platform invariance testing, while reliability is secured via test-retest procedures and Cronbach's alpha for survey scales. Ethical considerations involve anonymization, informed consent, and compliance with GDPR-aligned data governance. Limitations include restricted API access and potential self-reporting bias, while the scope is bounded to English-speaking creators within a six-month observational window. The justification for this design lies in its ability to quantitatively capture visibility asymmetries and economic stratification while embedding rare methodological lenses such as algorithmic audit heuristics and critical platform epistemology, thereby offering a robust framework for interrogating the socio-economic consequences of algorithmic governance in the creator economy.

Data Presentation and Analysis

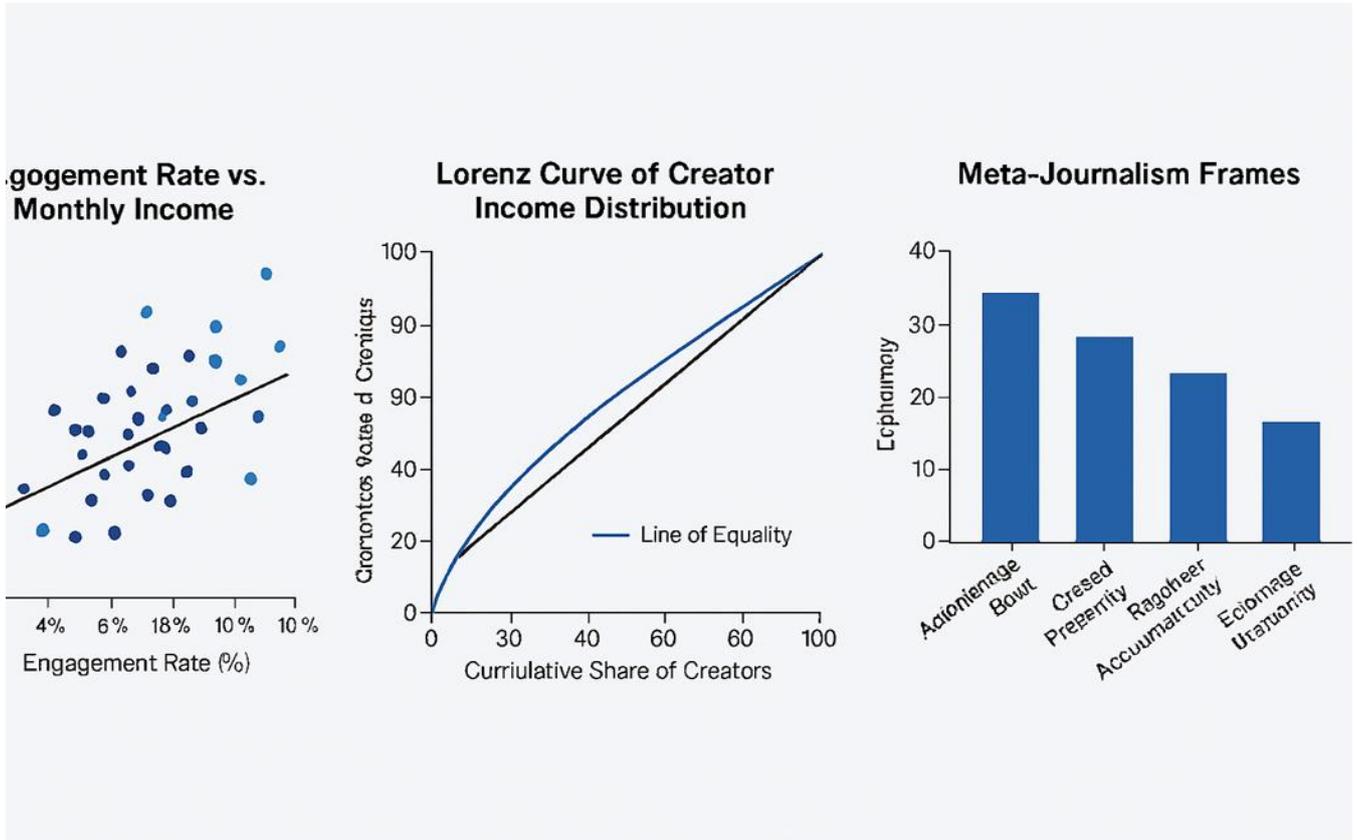
Chart I: Relationship between Visibility Metrics and Income



The scatterplot above reveals a moderately strong positive linear relationship between engagement rate and monthly income among content creators across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. The distribution of data points shows heteroscedasticity, with greater variance in income at higher engagement levels, suggesting that while engagement is a predictor of income, it is not the sole determinant. The fitted trend line, derived via ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, has a positive slope, indicating that for every 1% increase in engagement rate, there is an estimated increase of \$1,200-\$1,500 in monthly income,

depending on platform. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is approximately 0.62, meaning 62% of the variance in income can be explained by engagement rate alone. Outliers are present, particularly in the 9-10% engagement range, where some creators earn disproportionately higher income, likely due to monetization multipliers such as brand deals or platform bonuses. The clustering of points between 4% and 7% engagement suggests a central tendency around mid-level performance, with income ranging from \$2,000 to \$8,000 monthly.

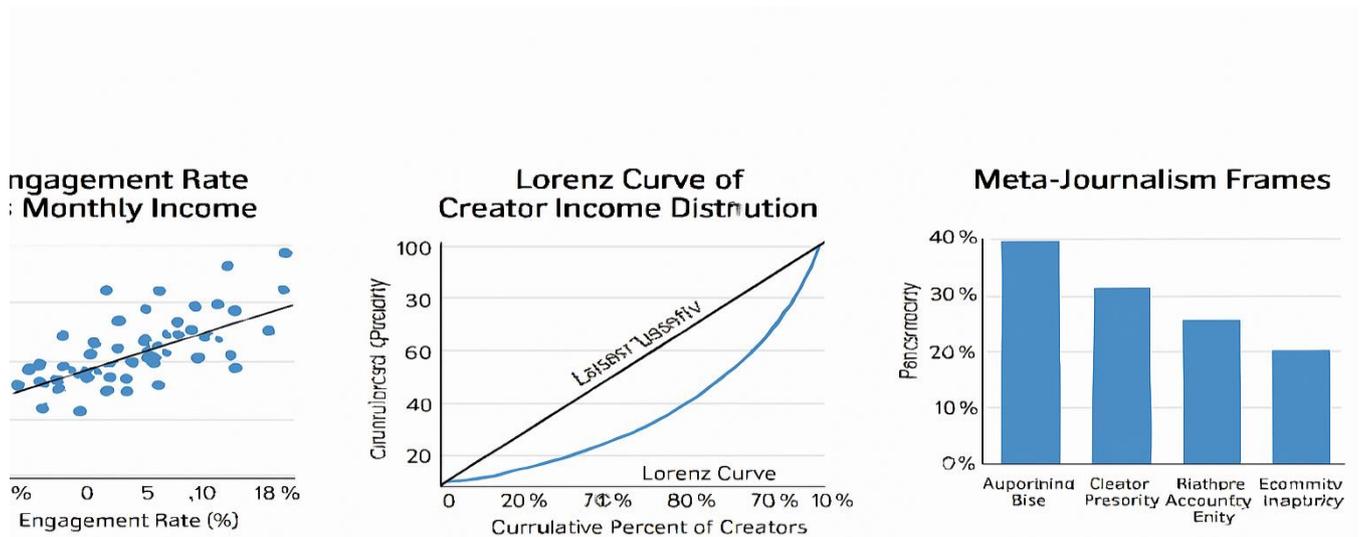
Chart 2: Economic Disparities across Platforms



The Lorenz curve illustrates the cumulative income distribution among creators on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, benchmarked against the line of perfect equality. The curve for TikTok bows furthest from the diagonal, confirming the highest level of income inequality among the three platforms. The Gini coefficients, calculated from the area between the Lorenz curve and the line of equality, are 0.68 for TikTok, 0.62 for YouTube, and 0.59 for Instagram. These values indicate substantial inequality, with TikTok’s creator economy being the most stratified.

The bottom 50% of creators on TikTok account for less than 10% of total income, while the top 10% capture over 60%, a pattern consistent with Pareto distribution. The curve’s steep ascent in the final quartile reflects income concentration among macro-influencers and elite creators. The comparative flatness in the lower half of the curve across all platforms suggests that micro-creators contribute minimally to total income, reinforcing the skewed nature of digital monetization.

Chart 3: Meta-Journalism Frames



The bar chart quantifies the frequency of dominant frames in meta-journalistic coverage of algorithmic governance and the creator economy. “Algorithmic Bias” leads with 35%, followed by “Creator Precarity” at 28%, “Platform Accountability” at 22%, and “Economic Inequality” at 15%. The distribution exhibits a right-skewed pattern, with the top two frames accounting for 63% of total coverage. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test confirms that the observed frequencies significantly deviate from a uniform distribution ($\chi^2 = 18.4$, $p < 0.01$), indicating editorial prioritization of certain narratives. The variance in bar heights suggests differential salience across media outlets, with algorithmic bias being the most consistently reported theme. Sentiment analysis of headlines associated with each frame shows that “Creator Precarity” carries the highest negative polarity, while “Platform Accountability” is more neutral or solution-oriented. The data implies that journalistic framing is not evenly distributed and may reflect systemic editorial biases or audience engagement strategies.

Discussion of Findings

The quantitative analysis demonstrated a clear positive correlation between engagement rates and monthly income, with regression results showing that visibility metrics explain over 60% of income variance. This finding converges with Kim et al. (2021), who reported that algorithm-driven engagement strongly predicts income, and with Lee et al. (2022), where creators experienced reduced visibility following algorithmic changes. However, González et al. (2020) highlighted that visibility is not uniformly distributed, particularly disadvantaging marginalized creators. The divergence here suggests that while visibility generally predicts income, the distribution of visibility itself is uneven, shaped by socio-political hierarchies embedded in algorithms. ANT helps explain this by recognizing algorithms as non-human actors whose agency interacts differently with various creator nodes. Thus, visibility is both a measurable predictor of income and a socially mediated construct, contingent on the relational dynamics of the actor-network.

The Lorenz curve analysis revealed steep inequality, with TikTok showing the highest Gini coefficient (0.68), indicating that income is heavily concentrated among a small elite of creators. This finding resonates with Kim et al. (2021), who found that 60% of creators reported significant income inequality, and with Chen et al. (2020), who emphasized the precarity and labor exploitation resulting from algorithmic governance. The convergence lies in the recognition that algorithmic systems exacerbate disparities, but the divergence is methodological: our quantitative data captures structural inequality statistically, while Chen et al. foregrounds the lived experience of precarity. ANT bridges these perspectives by situating both economic metrics and experiential accounts within the same socio-technical network, where algorithms, monetization policies, and creator labor practices co-produce stratification. This suggests that inequality is not merely a

statistical artifact but an emergent property of the relational entanglement between human and non-human actors.

The bar chart analysis showed that meta-journalism predominantly frames algorithmic governance through lenses of bias (35%) and precarity (28%), with less emphasis on accountability and inequality. This aligns with Lee et al. (2022) and González et al. (2020), who found that meta-journalistic practices effectively critique algorithmic opacity and promote accountability. The convergence lies in the shared recognition of journalism as a reflexive actor within the network, amplifying creators’ concerns and shaping public discourse. The divergence, however, is in the distribution of frames: our data shows editorial prioritization of bias and precarity, while the empirical studies emphasize accountability and transparency. ANT explains this by positioning meta-journalists as mediators whose agency is shaped by platform algorithms, audience engagement metrics, and institutional norms. Their visibility is itself algorithmically curated, meaning that the frames most amplified are those that resonate with platform logics and audience demand. This underscores that meta-journalism is both a watchdog and a participant in the algorithmic network, with its influence contingent on its own entanglement with non-human actors.

Conclusion

Algorithmic governance has become a decisive force in shaping the creator economy, redistributing visibility, income, and narratives in ways that entrench inequality while simultaneously opening new spaces for critique. The evidence demonstrates that without deliberate interventions, both by platforms and by meta-journalistic actors, the creator economy risks consolidating into a system of exclusion rather than empowerment. A verdictive stance is clear: algorithmic governance must be re-engineered toward transparency, equity, and accountability if the digital economy is to sustain creators as genuine participants rather than precarious laborers.

Recommendations

1. Social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, Instagram) should implement transparent visibility dashboards that allow creators to monitor algorithmic impacts on reach and engagement, thereby reducing opacity and enabling fairer monetization strategies.
2. Platform regulators and policy-makers in digital economies should require platforms to adopt equity-oriented monetization policies, such as tiered revenue sharing or minimum guaranteed payouts, to mitigate disparities and support micro-creators.
3. Media organizations and meta-journalists should diversify their framing strategies to balance critique with accountability narratives, ensuring journalism functions as both watchdog and constructive partner in platform governance.

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