PLATFORMED HOPE: NAVIGATING PLATFORM MONETIZATION IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO INDUSTRY

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Introduction

The economic growth and opportunities of digital platforms such as YouTube and Facebook are engendering career possibilities around the globe. In Nigeria, this inspired content creators who make short-form video content for millions of domestic and diaspora Africans. In the past five years, this industry segment has made significant contributions to the domestic screen industries, ranking as third, with a revenue exceeding US$39 million (Businessday, 2022). Extant work has celebrated how social media entertainment is creating employment for thousands of Nigerians (Ojomo & Sodeinde, 2021). Nevertheless, the precarious labour conditions of creative workers remain obscured. To address this lack of transparency, this paper contributes to debates about the "platformization of cultural production" (Poell et al., 2021) by exploring how Nigerian creators navigate the inherent precarity of platform monetization on YouTube and Facebook through what we characterize as "platformed hope."

To understand this specific instance of creator labour, we conducted telephone interviews with 15 Nigerian creators between 2024 and 2025. About 8 are established monetized creators with huge fanbase while the remaining 7 are up-and-coming, or better said, yet to-monetize creators. All participants use both YouTube and Facebook for content distribution. The established creators reflected on their monetization journeys on platforms, while the up-and-coming creators explored current struggles. Both categories of participants provided insights to how "platformed hope" shapes career trajectories. Second, we integrated analysis of the domestic trade press about content creation. From the foregoing, we observe that creators struggle with meeting platforms monetization criteria, especially the required amount of watch hours and

subscribers/followers, thereby frustrating their ability to profit from their work. To be sure, this kind of struggle is not unique to Nigeria as creators from across the globe face similar challenges (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Lukan & Zajc, 2024). That being said, we found that a set of domestic cultural norms distinguish how Nigerian creators integrate *spiritual beliefs* in forming a sentiment of hope. This, in turn, provides inspiration to confront the precarity inherent to platform monetization. Embedded in our proposed analytical lens, we identify two faith

driven monetization strategies adopted by creators: (1) transactional para-sociality and (2) reversed labour remuneration. We will unpack these strategies below. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to ongoing research on "global perspectives to platforms and cultural production," which aims to decentre the Global North as *the* point of reference (Poell et al, 2025). It also extends existing debates on how creators leverage local dynamics in navigating the centralized economic and governance logics of globally operating platforms.

Theorizing hope in Platform Labour

Whether in analogue or digital form, workers are said to practice hope as a way of making their working lives habitable, rather than a state of resignation or despair. Such forms of labour – theorized as "aspirational labour" (Duffy, 2016), "sacrificial labour" (Ross, 2003), "provisional labour" (Frenette, 2013), and indeed "hope" labour (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013) – represent situations in which creative workers justify non-monetary investments based on anticipated *future* improvements to their employment relationship and career realization. These inclinations and attitudes have been understood in two ways. One perceives hopeful workers as victims of "cruel optimism" (Berlant, 1997) or "lucid authoritarianism" (Bulut, 2023), wherein media companies extract value from poorly compensated workers, whose utopian focus on future career realization or a "big break" prevents them from changing course.

The second strand focuses on hope as a coping mechanism that reflects the practical everyday agency of creative workers as a means to make their working life liveable in the face of chronic precarity (Alacovska, 2019). In this sense, hope is not seen as a self exploiting aspiration for future stardom or "good work," but rather a psychological configuration focused on achieving a sane present life (Alacovska et al, 2021; Agbiboa, 2017). Expanding on these two debates, and as explored in the following section, we propose the idea of "platformed hope" to understand how platforms institutional politics shape specific hope-driven monetization strategies among Nigerian creators. Such labour translates into a seed-sowing imaginary wherein creators, being deeply cognizant of platform-induced precarity, do not simply wait for their "big break," nor adopt hope as a necessary existential coping mechanism for a precarious present. Instead, hope manifests as intentional and shared set of entrepreneurial actions to shape future economic potential.

"Hope without work is dead": Platformed hope among Nigerian creators

What, then, does platformed hope look like in its empirical context? The Nigerian creators we interviewed noted that meeting monetization requirements on YouTube and Facebook significantly depends on creators' ability to attract and retain audiences

through consistent uploads of trending and relatable contents. Over the years, Nigerian creators
have been unable to easily meet the monetization requirements of these platforms due to what they describe as a glut in supply or "an abundance of creators and contents." In such a competitive and congested space, sustaining audience attention as well as convincing them to take monetization-oriented actions such as subscribing to channels and following pages, is challenging requiring significant "visibility labour," a form of work that is "enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of self-conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces" (Abidin, 2016, p.90). Nigerian creators also navigate this challenge, or what they call a "monetization nightmare," through strategic actions that are mostly rooted in their cultural and spiritual beliefs about the usefulness of hope. As one interviewee YouTube creator puts it "I grew up in a modest family with the training on the need to keep pushing forward despite difficulties. I also believe that God will come through for me. That's why I'm still in content creation." This hope-driven attitude resonates with the ideas of "spiritualization" as a response to precarity, common in African cultural industries (See Alacovska, 2019; Simon, 2022).

Notably, this imaginary of hope entails a great deal of work to "make the monetization dream come to life." Specifically, we found two approaches—*transactional para-sociality* and *reversed labour remuneration*—as central to the practice of platformed hope among creative workers. This reflects the intersection of Nigerian local specificities with how creators navigate the centralised logics of platforms. First, creators understand that parasocial relationships and interactions, such as subscribing to creators' channels, following creators' pages, as well as sharing, liking, and commenting on contents, enhance visibility and therefore the possibility of monetisation. While others have pointed to collective forms of engagement in other contexts – for example Instagram creators creating "engagement pods" (O'Meara, 2019) – the practices we encountered are not a form of resistance but better understood as "transactional para-sociality." That is, creators financially induce their followers and subscribers to "share, like, and comment, and then post their bank details to get paid." As a creator noted "If you must meet the monetization requirements and sustain engagement on your page or channel, your followers must see you as a generous person, and they will commit to supporting you." Second, Nigerian creators seek visibility through "reversed labour remuneration," wherein lesser-known creators pay established creators to work for the latter. Rather than being paid for labour, this role reversal means that the labourer pays to labour: "I paid stars to work for them for free hoping that the accruing exposure adds to my journey to monetisation." While hope and spirituality represent everyday practices in Nigeria (Simon, 2024; Agbiboa, 2017), the creators' strategies depict platformed hope as they reflect practices of faith orchestrated by the unique economic, governmental, and infrastructural logics of platforms. Thus, the practices of transactional para-sociality and reversed labour remuneration are strategic actions to attain monetization desire, but they also illustrate how Nigerian socio-cultural and economic dynamics – including the inclinations of hope and spirituality – shape platform-dependent cultural production as much as they define other aspects of life in Nigeria.

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