

## Could the Motherhood Identity be Constructed Through Commodification on Social Media?

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents insights into the commodification that constructs identity. The researcher focuses on mothers who have become micro-celebrities on social media. While maternal identity was previously confined to private or domestic spaces, mothers now appear as content creators. This reflects a process of commodification that transforms maternal experiences into commercial value. The commodification process of mothers involves identity reconstruction that integrates maternal values with the business dynamics of the digital era. The resulting content not only builds emotional closeness with the audience but also shapes a new paradigm in the social representation of mothers. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores how social media commodification shapes the dynamics of cultural norms, national identity, and traditional values. The result reveals that motherhood identity has undergone negotiation among mothers, the social environment, and the social media market to reach a mutually beneficial meeting point. The results also open the door to critical discussion of the impact of technology on the construction of identity and traditional values. It also provides in-depth insights into identity shifts amidst the flow of digitalization. Thus, this article contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding of the commodification and identity of mothers in social media spaces.

**Keywords:** Commodification; Micro Celebrities; Motherhood Identity; Social Media

## 1. Introduction

This manuscript argues that identity is the result of social and cultural construction, shaped by norms, values, and cultural practices that apply in society (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Cultural identities - including motherhood identities - are contextual and are constantly reproduced through social interactions. (Barker, 2012). In other words, motherhood is also a social construction of cultural expectations that can be created through social interactions in social media spaces. Digital platforms, such as social media, contribute to the reproduction of identities reconfigured by technology and culture. (Rahmawati et al., 2024; Rosyidah & Nurwati, 2019). The representation of motherhood identity on social media is depicted through content uploads. Social media has become an arena for reconstructing motherhood narratives from various cultural contexts, even beyond cultural and geographical boundaries.

Starting from this idea, the author argues that the continuous reproduction of identity on social media can lead to commodification. Thus, uploading commodified content can manifest the construction of motherhood identity. The author observes mothers who actively produce social media content on motherhood, covering various topics that attract attention and garner many followers, such as daily life vlogs, parenting tips, child education, recipes and cooking, and motherhood creativity (Archer, 2019a). Various content uploads from various cultural contexts are also displayed. Some associate the identity of a mother with sacrifice, patience, and gentleness, or a creative and independent figure. These mothers engage in commodification that builds identity through the commercialisation of personal and social practices (Krzyżanowska, 2020; Takševa, 2012). This process extends to the realm of privacy, where anonymity becomes a paid service, making privacy a commodity object (Mosco, 2009) for mothers.

Consistency in content production in sharing stories about parenting and household management makes social media an informal workspace. This means that mothers can earn income from home. (Mahameruaji et al., 2018). For example, Indonesian mothers who have lived abroad typically tell stories of Indonesian motherhood like the following: Keluarga Bahagia di Jerman, Kimbab Family, My Ozlife, Shanty di China, Istive Musab? This phenomenon explains that, as mothers have become central figures in the family, their roles have changed along with the development of social media. Mothers emerge as content creators who present curated motherhood, moving from the private to the public realm and adapting to market mechanisms. This transformation reduces social life and individual identity to market-driven variables in market logic (Mosco, 2009). Motherhood becomes, in effect, a commodified asset rather than a social and emotional expression. They have been tied into the industrial structure of the platform business model (Hou, 2019).

In thinking about this, the author uses an economic and cultural approach because mothers on social media create a market that allows for new meanings of motherhood identity through the production of information. Commodification becomes a core understanding of political economy and communication (Mosco, 2009) by revealing the economic interests that shape media and cultural practices in the context of technology. In this argument, the author combines three processes: content, audience, and worker commodification (Mosco, 2009; Fuchs, 2015). The author sees these three forms as inseparable because social media increases connections among the economy, the audience, and creative workers in commercial interactions (Raun, 2018).

The commodification of motherhood refers to the process by which experiences and identities as mothers are constructed, marketed, and capitalized in the digital ecosystem (Krzyżanowska, 2020). Social media algorithms encourage content monetisation (Narayanan, 2023), often displaying idealised content. Thus, the narrative of the perfect motherhood identity

for social media users tends to be more recognized. This is the process that constructs motherhood as a product that social media users can consume. Mothers are exploited for commercial purposes through endorsements or sponsored content. They collaborate with brands, products, and even social media itself with their followers.

In this context, social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok attract advertisers and audiences, enabling mommy influencers to package the motherhood experience in a marketable form. Previous studies on commodification discussed family life (Syafuddin, 2020), children's talent (Nafsa & Zulhazmi, 2022), personal life (Noviasri & Andari, 2017), and audience commodification was also limited to how social media platforms work in commodifying viewers as workers (Febriyanti, 2021). The packaging that follows the logic of social media is in line with previous research, which states that social media creates hyperreality, where identity and lifestyle become commodities (Kamaruddin et al., 2024). Consumers not only consume products physically but also adopt narratives and images shaped by digital representation. This shows that the consumption process is inseparable from the dynamics of social construction influenced by social media platforms, so that products are no longer merely utilitarian functions but also serve as means of self-expression and of strengthening social status. Product packaging designed in line with social media aesthetics and trends plays a strategic role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences in today's digital era.

Social media platforms significantly influence commodification by transforming commodities to be sold to advertisers. These platforms use sophisticated measurement methods, such as cookies, online activity tracking, and demographic profiles, to generate detailed reports for advertisers (Mosco, 2009). These mothers follow aesthetic standards determined by algorithms and the market. Thus, commodification provides both economic benefits and pressure to meet the social media market's idealized standards of motherhood. In the results and discussion, the authors will examine whether the commodification of motherhood reduces the authentic meaning of motherhood and merely displays consumerist values, or opens up the possibility of empowering self-identity.

## 2. Literature Review

In this literature review, the discussion focuses on the relationship between commodification and identity. The literature review begins with classical theories and moves to modern theories, emphasizing that the meaning of motherhood on social media is not static. Motherhood identity develops through dialogue among economic, cultural, and technological values. The author explores social media as an intense arena for forming, exchanging, and commercializing personal identities such as motherhood. Classical thinking about commodification, identity, and gender helps us understand the process of transformation alongside the development of digitalization. The concept of commodification is rooted in classical Marxist theory. Karl Marx viewed commodification as the transformation of social values into economic values within the framework of capitalism (Marx, 1904). In Marx's framework, commodification is a manifestation of capitalist relations that transform aspects of life into commodities (Mosco, 2009). Although Marx focused on goods and services, his basic thinking provides a foundation for understanding that the capitalist system can change values in aspects of identity.

In another approach, Jean Baudrillard is an important figure who developed the theory of symbols and meaning in consumer culture and commodification (Mosco, 2009). In his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that in modern society, the meaning of objects

and symbols no longer refers to reality or their original function, but rather that the media produce and control them as sign values through a simulation system (Baudrillard, 1999). According to Baudrillard, commodification has blurred the boundaries between reality and image. Goods and symbols are seen as hyperreality that creates simulation and obscures the original meaning (Baudrillard, 1999). This concept helps explain how the representation of motherhood is created through deliberate editing in the commodification process. Thus, motherhood becomes an object of visual consumption for followers or subscribers.

Figures such as Adorno and Horkheimer further explain how popular culture becomes a medium for reproducing cultural objects into commodities (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2007). They see that the commodification of culture reduces diversity and produces within the framework of the capital system, where culture is used as a tool for manipulation and mass consumerism. Quoting them, this process produces a passive and alienated culture, where the original meaning and experience of human life are reduced to entertainment and shallow consumption images. These commodities are transformed into exchange values through the commodification of content, audiences, and labour (Mosco, 2018). Commodification requires the conversion of objects and services into products to be exchanged in the market (Mosco, 2009; Murdock, 2011). In the context of motherhood, there is a transactional economy in which sacred and personal motherhood values are commodified into mass consumption of social media narratives. Commodification follows market mechanisms from private life to broader capitalism (Fuchs, 2020) as activities that are usually in the private sphere are increasingly exchanged in the market (Sandel, 2013).

The discussion of the transition of commodification on social media in relation to identity formation can be in line with Erving Goffman's thoughts in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Identity is a performance in which individuals manage impressions to the public (Goffman, 1956). Mothers do not just display motherhood; they also act as products with brands. This concept aligns with commodification, in which mothers design motherhood performatively, changing personal values into market values to attract audiences. The blurring of boundaries between personal and commercial life can also be associated with self-branding, a real form of identity commodification. Mothers package themselves in brands to gain financial gain by becoming mumpreneurs or influencers (Archer, 2019a; Jorge et al., 2022).

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research employed a qualitative approach by analyzing data narratively (Snyder, 2019). The purpose of this narrative method was to collect data from scholarly articles that explore motherhood and its commodification. Researchers explored the subjective experiences of mothers in various social, economic, and cultural contexts. The initial stage of data collection was to determine the narrative focus on the role of mothers and their relationship to social media use. The second stage was to select scholarly articles on motherhood and commodification. The purpose of this selection was to examine how the social media market constructs maternal identities. The third stage involved reading narratives and coding techniques to identify themes. Through mapping story patterns, arguments about commodification and identity were identified. Researchers conceptualized topics studied by various researchers and disciplines (Wong et al., 2013).

The narrative method enabled the integration of perspectives from political economy, culture, and identity. A semi-systematic review of articles relevant to commodification in the context of motherhood allowed for the reconstruction of narratives. The researcher then analyzed the mapping results in the context of their development over time and across various

research traditions. This review guided the researcher in identifying and understanding relevant articles and in synthesizing them. Following the analysis, the author also noted research trends that had not yet addressed the issue of commodification. This aimed to question how the market not only determines products but also constructs the meaning of motherhood. Then, the final analysis positioned thematic or content analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in a text as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also included a critical reflection of the author's ideas to develop an agenda for further research on whether motherhood narratives are representative or fragmentary.

#### 4. Results

Could commodification construct motherhood identity on social media? The results of this paper state that it can. Before further discussion, we begin with the definition of mothers who commodify content, audiences, and workers on social media. Why is it important to see this definition? Because this definition leads to differences in views between sharing motherhood experiences naturally and sharing them through commercial strategies. Based on literature searches, mothers who produce domestic content commercially are referred to as influencers (Devos et al., 2022; Jorge et al., 2022, 2023), or mumpreneurs (Archer, 2019b, 2019a), or mommy bloggers (Cleaf, 2015; Germic et al., 2021; Gibson, 2019; Orton-Johnson, 2017; Raun, 2018). This definition combines commercial narratives and personal experiences that emphasize that they are actors in the logic of the digital economy. Mothers who share experiences of parenting and household management often receive product endorsement support (Jin et al., 2019; Veissi, 2017).

From this definition, a concept emerged that these mothers are micro-celebrities (Abidin & Brown, 2018; Raun, 2018). This definition refers to individuals who exert significant influence over their followers. This is in line with how these mothers attract brands that want to carry out marketing strategies (Abidin, 2016; Senft, 2008, 2013). The author argues that mothers as micro-celebrities represent motherhood, communicating its reality through technology that can change the dynamics of identity and foster new forms of motherhood on social media. Research on mothers who produce family content shows that the most subscribers and viewers are among those who do so (Blade, 2023a, 2023b).

Mothers as micro-celebrities present commercialization. When motherhood experience content is monetised, the dynamics of presenting motherhood align with market expectations. Especially on social media, content becomes a product of economic value. This shows that mothers as micro-celebrities occupy a space for discussing the meaning of motherhood, enabling them to play dual roles as mothers and workers on social media. The definition of mothers as micro-celebrities suggests an opportunity to convert personal experiences into products of economic value. Social media designs engagement through "likes", "comments", "subscribe", and "share" (Abidin, 2016; Bergen, 2022). In other words, they sell content and follow the algorithm or logic of the digital market, packaging identity to attract the market.

This is the process of commodification (Fuchs, 2012b; Mosco, 2009), namely, as individuals selling themselves as merchandise. Empirically, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok support business monetization. Uploading content that attracts engagement encourages micro-celebrities to build an ecosystem in which personal experiences become commodities with high market value. Recursive and expansive social media data collection practices deepen the commodification of content, audiences, and even identities (Mosco, 2009). Content commodification involves images, videos, and messages by media workers. Audience commodification occurs when social media users, as consumers, become

sources of data with economic value – audience data on identity, behavior, interests, and habits to target advertising. Worker commodification is treating content creators and producers as production factors that follow platform algorithms.

The argumentative statement of this writing is that the commodification of content, audiences, and workers is interconnected. This is understood as an ecosystem that is interdependent and reinforces each other to form the meaning of motherhood. Thus, when these three commodifications are connected, we can see that, on social media, mothers-as-workers produce content to attract audiences, then exploit audience data to generate profits and increase platform competitiveness (Fuchs & Mosco, 2016; Mosco, 2009). Continuous commodification will confirm subjectivity through digital interactions (Wittel, 2013). Economic value is shaped by audience response. Because audience data directs content that is relevant to the market, resulting in more engagement and profit. At the same time, workers continue to produce content to maintain and expand their audience. The author argues that this is a transformation in the structure of the digital economy, in which identity is no longer a personal issue but a formation within an economic framework. This process forms a mutually reinforcing cycle in the social media economic system. Therefore, mothers as micro-celebrities do not commodify by choice; it is integrated into social media platforms.

The author deepens thinking on the interconnectedness of the commodification of content, audiences, and workers, especially in social media. Platforms enable the convergence of content, audiences, and user data into a more integrated form of commodification (Athique, 2020). This form enables connected commodification because platforms continuously facilitate market access from producers to users, thereby altering the variety of commodities (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Sadowski, 2019). This conceptual shift sees content on digital platforms as a semi-public good because it is used without any reduction in the value of the goods (Hesmondhalgh, 2018). Thus, commodification not only occurs in the content produced, but also in the activities of the audience as a platform economic resource.

The development of the concept of commodification follows the dynamics of platform transformation (Hudders et al., 2021; Muslikhin et al., 2021). This concept helps understand the blending of barriers between the public and personal lives by converting motherhood's use value into exchange value on social media platforms (Caraway, 2011; Fuchs, 2012a). Studies that examine this further are not only about the commodification of audiences or workers, but also about platform users who are also workers (Fuchs, 2019). Thus, although social media does not "officially" employ micro-celebrities, it controls the production process and aligns content with advertiser interests (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020). This concept of commodification is useful for analysing the commercial exploitation of micro-celebrities through monetisation, which plays an important role in creating a market ecosystem that commodifies motherhood.

In viewing the complexity of commodification, the author assumes that mothers as micro-celebrities experience a dilemma in displaying their identity when producing content. Identity negotiation is necessary to achieve understanding and agreement about cultural identity (Gudykunst, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 1999). This is a process of agreeing on the exchange of ideas, values, norms, traditions, and cultures from the social environment. The display of individual identity includes family roles, and the integration of individual identities is a process of integrating socio-cultural, individual life experiences, and experiences of interaction within the family and with others (Bennett, 2015). The basic assumption is that humans in all cultures want positive identity affirmation in various communication situations (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). The author wants to convey that micro-celebrity mothers, in addition to considering digital economic mechanisms, also consider identity consistency (Bennett, 2015).

## 5. Discussion

In this discussion, the researcher presents three main ideas, including mothers as social media micro-celebrities, the construction of maternal identity, and the logic of commodification. In the media economy, microcelebrities are individuals with relatively few followers but significant influence (Raun, 2018). This is what attracts mothers because being a microcelebrity attracts brands that do not want to use mainstream celebrities. Through consistent content interactions, microcelebrities can create strong emotional connections, thereby influencing their audience's consumption behavior (Abidin, 2016). Through various interactive features, mothers as micro-celebrities have space on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to share their experiences. These experiences were previously hidden in the private realm. Now, more complex narratives of motherhood have emerged to fill social media spaces in diverse cultural contexts.

The construction of the meaning of motherhood is possible because social media supports this construction through how mothers display motherhood (Archer, 2019b). Social media changes the way mothers express their motherhood identity. Social media serves as a platform for building an authentic and commercial motherhood identity through personal marketing narratives. Through the narratives they contain, they not only represent motherhood but also construct it in contemporary ways, thus presenting a dynamic plurality of motherhood identities. Social media allows for the articulation of motherhood identities in a heterogeneous manner. The representation of motherhood reflects the ongoing negotiation of its meaning. The identity negotiations that occur not only reflect socio-cultural conditions but also shape an inclusive discourse of motherhood that challenges traditional norms. The author also has an assumption that there is a possibility that mothers as micro-celebrities are outside the classical social construct of motherhood (Suryakusuma, 2011). This is because micro-celebrities who build plural motherhood narratives do not always refer to motherhood as a role.

The dynamics of the digital economy influence the fragmentation of motherhood, particularly within the domestic sphere. The logic of commodification generates normative expectations surrounding the performance of the "ideal mother" (Chae, 2015). Within this context, micro-celebrity mothers mediate representations of motherhood that extend beyond domestic responsibilities to include self-commercialization and personal branding practices. They practice intensive parenting through productive, creative content, which is further amplified by social media algorithms through visibility and content promotion. Consequently, social media operates as a new arena in which motherhood identity shifts from purely domestic functions toward commercially mediated digital expressions.

The role of commodification in constructing motherhood identity is reflected in the curated representations mothers display online (Abidin, 2017; Hatfield, 2018). For instance, prior research demonstrates that working mothers featured in digital media can serve as aspirational role models, reinforcing positive narratives of social status and achievement (Chae, 2015). Moreover, studies suggest that commercialized motherhood constructs ideals of "good mothering" through the provision of intensive care, emotional nurturing, and child-centered investment (Hays, 1996; Takševa, 2012). In this framing, commercialization refers to childcare practices increasingly mediated by commodities, services, and branded consumption.

Thus, beyond caregiving, mothers are positioned simultaneously as consumers responsible for selecting products and services deemed capable of optimizing childcare outcomes. Other scholarship has examined how ideals of perfect or intensive motherhood are performed through social media displays of well-being and family life (Abidin, 2017; Jacobson, 2013). These representations often require mothers to project images of happiness, harmony, and

domestic success, encompassing narratives of care quality, children's achievements, and household management.

Three main ideas in the previous paragraph suggest that academics and other researchers are researching micro-celebrities among mothers. This emphasizes that the commodification that occurs is a process of cultural exchange in the form of informal work. Therefore, the researcher invites researchers and academics to formulate research problems regarding how micro-celebrities of mothers commodify motherhood through social media platforms. Thus, we see that micro-celebrities of mothers use social media as a means of production to gain economic benefits. In addition, they play a role in the construction of motherhood identity on social media. They also respond to their followers' needs by producing digital culture that strengthens the representation of motherhood.

The construction of motherhood identity through the commodification approach sees the meanings of motherhood change as they are shaped by economic value in the dynamics of the social media market. Where social media pushes motherhood identity into a product. Mothers are no longer figures who play a role in the domestic, affectionate, and nurturing realms; they also become objects with economic value. Motherhood identity is also attached to visual elements that are no longer limited to social reality but are transformed into symbols and images that drive audience consumption. The study of the transformation of the meaning of motherhood through a commodification approach has never discussed how motherhood is represented. Generally, these studies still focus on the representation of mothers because there is limited space for mothers to interact (Capdevila et al., 2022; Chusna, 2021). This section is an academic gap using a perspective that has not been used before.

Motherhood identity has been negotiated among mothers, the social environment, and the social media market to reach a mutually beneficial meeting point. Basically, every individual needs a positive identity in social interaction (Ting-Toomey, 2017). In this view, positive identity is a way for individuals to maintain a consistent self-image. Therefore, motherhood identity on social media is not a static concept. This process explains that motherhood is indeed constructed, both in the attachment to traditional cultural heritage, such as parenting practices, and in the responsibility for caring for the household and children. In addition, they adapt to the social media market to reach a profitable audience, such as making videos about fun parenting tips, showing the lifestyle of working mothers, or becoming entrepreneurs to showcase independence and creativity. Negotiations in the social media market are relevant to the concept of hyperreality, in which the boundaries between reality and representation become blurred (Baudrillard, 1999). This means that authentic identity may not survive intact but is replaced by an image created and reinforced by market mechanisms to be liked by fans.

This discussion recommends that other researchers view these micro-celebrities as mothers without formal jobs. This is their way of constructing identities by commercialising their personal lives on social media. The development of social media, especially social media, provides alternatives for women as mothers without formal jobs to do informal work. This has led to increasing fragmentation of content production managed by mothers. Therefore, the author hopes that the identity of motherhood and the process of family commodification can be useful to mothers living in other countries. The author also hopes that this study can serve as a reference and a basis for criticism to introduce structural analysis of women's identities in an increasingly connected and globalized world. This idea recommends continuing research because the available evidence is limited.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper examines the dynamics of the digital economy and culture that influence mothers as micro-celebrities in shaping motherhood. This occurs through a process of commodification, in which the content of mothers' personal experiences as caregivers and family managers is marketed to digital audiences. This phenomenon marks the possibility of a shift from traditional motherhood to depicting motherhood as an economically valuable product. The author asserts that social media serves as the primary platform for mothers to produce motherhood content by leveraging economic opportunities through endorsements, brand collaborations, and marketing. This process not only shows the possibility of reconfiguring the meaning of motherhood within the digital economy, but also emphasises productivity as a symbol of the ideal mother. This transformation also opens up space for the audience to participate in constructing the meaning of motherhood through digital interactions.

Furthermore, the author identifies an important economic dynamic in this study: mothers with micro-celebrity status have succeeded in leveraging their fame to collaborate with brands and generate income, a previously unheard-of phenomenon in the discourse of motherhood. This suggests that social media success has contributed to a shift not only in the representation of motherhood but also in women's economic roles, paving the way for a broader understanding of how domestic life can be commercialized in the digital ecosystem.

Finally, the author suggests the importance of further research in understanding how this commodification phenomenon constructs the meaning of motherhood. The article also invites researchers and academics to delve deeper into the unique contexts and experiences of micro-celebrity mothers living abroad, and into the profound impacts of their engagement in digital spaces. In doing so, this study fills the gap in knowledge regarding motherhood in the modern era and offers valuable insights into understanding women's identities in social media spaces.

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## 8. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal affiliations that could have influenced the research or findings presented in this article.

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