



Commodifying Intimacy: Labor Dynamics in Virtual Lover Rental Services on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

Intimacy on social media is increasingly shaped by commodification, where relationships are constructed not through trust but through transactional practices embedded in broader political-economic dynamics. Instagram, as a commercialized social platform, enables individuals to “sell” the promise of fulfilling personal and social needs, positioning intimacy as a desacralized commodity. This study addresses the growing urgency of understanding how the commodification of intimacy transforms contemporary perceptions of romantic relationships. The research aims to examine how meaningful forms of intimacy are converted into profane, marketable services within Instagram-based virtual girlfriend/boyfriend rental accounts. Using a multiple case study approach, data were collected through interviews and digital observations of accounts such as @rentmate.id, @sewapacaronline.id, and @rntl.pacar_id between September and October 2024. Drawing on Mosco’s concept of commodification and the intimacy frameworks of Jamieson and Register & Henley, the analysis shows that intimacy within these services is tightly intertwined with labor dynamics and power relations. Account owners exercise authority over talents treated as transactional assets, while the talents face exploitative conditions manifested in flexible yet uncertain work hours, ambiguous contractual arrangements, leisure-oriented work discourses, self-ideological demands, and bodily negotiation. The study contributes to intimacy studies within communication scholarship by highlighting how digital labor structures reshape emotional exchange in commodified online environments. It also offers insights into emerging forms of intimacy that reflect ongoing tensions between cultural values and economic imperatives.

Keywords

political-economy, labor exploitation, digital intimacy, lover rental services, social media

To cite this article (7th APA style):

Aini, S. N., & Kurnia, N. (2025). Commodifying Intimacy: Labor Dynamics in Virtual Lover Rental Services on Instagram. *Journal Communication Spectrum: Capturing New Perspectives in Communication*, 15(1), 25-38. <https://doi.org/10.36782/jcs.v15i1.2605>

INTRODUCTION

New industries are constantly developing through social media in line with the massiveness of users and the novelty of the technology that surrounds them. This condition is inseparable from the intervention of social media in the realm of romantic relationships and intimacy practices. The shift in intimacy and the emergence of various forms of relationships are mediated and accompanied by the presence of business practices in cyberspace. Social media offers various modes used by the industry to create the first step in building relationships, finding partners, and exploring romantic desires. Desire as a micro element of the self becomes the main point for the logic of capital to gain profit through the digital arena. Borrowing the thoughts of Carbonero & Garrido (2018), in the era of late-capitalism, communicative and emotional abilities in the form of empathy, caring for others, and self-expression are some important aspects to master business competition and transactions.

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Therefore, this research has several objectives, including explaining how virtual lover rental services account commodify intimacy through Instagram social media. In addition, this research aims to explore the intertwining of intimacy with social life trends that are constantly being rolled out on Instagram. This research has limitations in the method of analysis, namely the multiple case study method. This presents a potential gap in the depth of data generated on each research subject. Researchers do not focus on aspects of the characteristics of research subjects with details in the form of account engagement, fame, income, and so on. Meanwhile, the social media that the researcher focuses on is Instagram and does not see the practice of commodification of intimacy in other platforms. This paper only explores commodification at the level of labor, further researchers can investigate in the aspect of content to the audience.

Collective actions that are organized and deliberately created in business activities are always present as part of the intimacy industry. The “company” that operates in social media by making intimacy a commodity does not escape the synergy of the owner to the labor in it. Their role as audience eventually becomes an active part to conduct transactional activities, actively produce content, and attract the attention of other audiences. According to Gershon (in Lambert, 2019), cultural values regarding intimacy and privacy change along with the exploration of new technologies. This dynamic represents a new iteration of the capitalist conception of “love as market” that offers tools to manage relationships as “commodified play” (Hobbs et al., 2017) as well as profit (Best & Delmege, 2012).

An attractive alternative that is currently loved by urbanites and offered through social media spaces is a virtual lover rental services. Unlike online dating applications, through virtual lover rental services, customers do not need to spend more effort to select and introduce potential partners. However, a “partner” can be had by renting to accompany themselves both online and offline. The desire to have freedom without significant ties and responsibilities is always reflected. Borrowing Hubertus’s thoughts (in Hemawati & Rahmat, 2023), the selection of hired virtual lover is due to the fear of consumerism in relationships and the inability to bear the consequences economically. In tandem with the need for a romantic life, the development of Instagram social media also reinforces how the practice of hiring a virtual lover operates.

Virtual lover rental services account are spreading and have a strong presence on the social media Instagram, in addition to being present on X and TikTok. Instagram has an interesting mode at the level of photos, videos, audio, stories, highlights, reels that characterize it compared to other types of social media. This is a potential for them to promote and attract audience attention through content uploaded to Instagram accounts. Content about talent visualization, service pricelist, testimonials, and so on are always rolled out to strengthen the business activities that are the axis. The increasing popularity of Instagram among young people has made Instagram famous in the business industry with visual strategies (Hamid & Suhaimi, 2020). The practice of intimacy, which is no longer obtained by “dream” means, is obtained through transactional means that do not respect love and are mediated through Instagram.

As Illouz (2007) points out, intimate lives are constantly articulated through social media and represent a culture of “emotional capitalism”. Emotions are increasingly growing into an entity that is bargained for, measured, and commodified. The regulation of relationships that are expected to be established increasingly follows how the logic of the market is always present. Market-based cultural repertoires are able to shape and influence interpersonal and emotional relationships (Illouz, 2007). In the atmosphere of social media space that is always moving, users simultaneously internalize the market logic and follow the flow of commodification without realizing it. According to Verdu (2006), Bialski (2007), and Lardellier (2015), social media shapes intimacy as a commodity in itself and as a result users are increasingly involved in the process of objectifying others and themselves.

Intimacy mediated by social media is increasingly experiencing a transformation of meaning and shows the thinning of boundaries in liquid relationships. In line with Bauman (in Muniruzzaman, 2017), now the concept of love is plunged as liquid love where the affection expressed does not have to be based on the bond of the two related individuals. That the practice of intimacy relations based on mutual satisfaction is increasingly gloomy (Manasikana & Noviani, 2021). The business relationship in the virtual lover rental service that overshadows intimacy indicates the presence of

emotional ties in real relationships. Intimacy shifts with actions that are far from the dogmatic side by becoming a dream orientation of “ideal” relationships in virtual space. The degradation of the sacredness of intimacy is shown by the construction of relationship ownership that is legalized through the obligation to pay. Kamanjaya (in Munte, 2024) stated that the business practice of renting a virtual lover is a sign that society's view of intimacy in relationships has shifted.

Relations of intimacy are increasingly shifting through the transactional process of virtual lover rental services that show humans as active subjects in producing and utilizing capital. Detraditionalization covers intimacy relations that are increasingly developing and procreating in business practices. This condition is inseparable from cultural dynamics and contextualizes the demand and supply of intimacy. The practice of intimacy has undergone desecralization, which was originally legitimized by religion and the state, can now be enjoyed through various profane relationships. According to Meike (in Gumulya, 2023), relationships are no longer built on trust, but based on manipulation and transactional practices. The expression of culture becomes a commodity and creates a new market niche. “The commodification of everything” represents Harrison's thought (in Hall, 2023), that everything is traded including services, minds, bodies, and souls.

The presence of virtual lover rental services has caused problems in Indonesia, namely in the Mataram city. Even one of virtual lover rental services account has received calls to close its Instagram account. Jumadi (in Sofian, 2023) said that it was feared that the service could be misused and would lead to acts of prostitution that could take victims. On the other hand, Putra (in Shabrina, 2023) mentioned that social media accounts for virtual lover rental services can also be used as a pimping ground to target teenagers who could potentially be employed as sex workers. This counter response from the community regarding the emergence of virtual lover rental services is intertwined with eastern norms and aspects of religiosity that they have always believed in. Instead of being affected by the rejection, the account actually creates a way to pop up in social media and presents a new phenomenon economically and culturally.

The business motive surrounding henna rental services creates a threat to the family institution. Hubertus (in Hemawati & Rahmat, 2023) emphasized that this condition threatens the family institution in terms of existence and tradition as well as the sanctity and certainty of life of the next generation. In accordance with Radius (in Dienfitri, 2022), due to the massive flow of technology, rental services are considered to be increasingly “becoming” and triggering a sexual revolution that was born as another chaos. It is within these societal dynamics that research on commodification intimacy in virtual lover rental services industry takes place. Intimacy as an inherent aspect of the individual and collective spheres is contested with the orientation to dominate the market through exclusive scenarios. This dynamic plays out in an economic arena that is closely related to business actions through the logic of capital by hiring account. In such an arena, there is little that is currently able to be comprehensively interpreted regarding the practice of the power in placing and negotiating intimacy as a product that sold in the media.

Based on the prariset data, intimacy becomes a commodity commodified by the account of virtual lover rental services on Instagram where it appears through labor. That appears to be carried out on female and male talents. On the other hand, this phenomenon also illustrates how gender shapes the structure of digital labor. Women tend to be placed in highly visible and virtually standardized positions, whereas men are assigned to different roles. This is intertwined with how talent must follow account rules regarding visual standards, treatment of clients, masculine and feminine traits, maintaining self-image. The commodification of intimacy is also intertwined with gender issues that lead to account ideology, social context, and orientation to construct. Gender is one of the triggers for the creation of different portions of the number of workers in the hiring account. Based on preliminary data on 3 accounts, as of July 3, 2024 the talent is dominated by women with a ratio of 31:12 (@sewapacaronline.id), 26:5 (@rentmate.id), and 36:5 (@sewapacar__). This condition attracts the assumption that women are inseparable from objectification wrapped in visualization in the economic and media arenas in boyfriend rental services. Gender dynamics are always closely related to power relations in account ownership and lead to favoritism towards certain genders.

Various studies related to the commodification of intimacy that show a shift in the value of intimacy have been conducted in the social sciences. Intimacy is examined in terms of power and

the material components used. Various transactional relationships are highlighted in sugar dating relationships to dating apps with aspects of intimacy in the form of emotional to physical closeness. However, the research presented has not been able to define that there is a relationship that involves the intertwining of micro elements, the power of capital, and social media space in the account of virtual lover rental services. Globalization not only creates commodification of intimacy over sex, but presents opportunities to define new types of relationships, spaces, meanings, and expressions of intimacy (Constable, 2009). This research tries to fill that gap.

It can be observed that studies on commodified intimacy tend to focus on dating apps and sugar dating. Consequently, little is known about the specific business practices within virtual lover services on Instagram, particularly regarding the labor dynamics embedded within them. The researcher wants to show that studies related to the commodification of intimacy and its intertwining with the media have a broad focus. It is still able to be examined into other specific topics and produce in-depth examinations. Studies that are directly intertwined with the commodification of intimacy carried out by virtual lover rental services accounts through Instagram social media haven't yet to be found. Researchers emphasize the urgency to look at research related to the commodification of intimacy comprehensively into several aspects such as the production of media messages through Instagram, the intimacy that is traded, to the process of changing the value of intimacy into a commodity, as well as the power relations and gender issues that surround it.

In the economic complexity that wraps intimacy in social media, this research idea on the topic of "commodification of intimacy" is present. That the economic dimension is intertwined with the fundamental communication tool, namely the social media Instagram, is increasingly widespread. The media has the potential to construct new ways of interpreting and playing roles. Media images, narratives, and spectacles become part of the formation of individual views on the deepest value and are able to shape a shared culture (Kellner, 2020). By observing the intimacy in the "delusional" relationship offered by the account on Instagram. The question that is always attached to this dynamic is how is the commodification of intimacy carried out by virtual rental services industry on Instagram social media? This research has a research scope on hetero relationships offered by virtual lover rental services. This is related to the openness of the intimacy industry in Indonesia towards hetero romantic relationships compared to gay relationships which are still not generally accepted.

METHOD

This research is a multiple case study using a critical paradigm. The assumption of critical social research is that social reality is constantly changing and based on various tensions and contradictions in relations (Neuman, 2014). Through the multiple case study method, researchers can find and present a detailed and comparative picture of the issue of a cultural and media dynamic, namely the commodification of intimacy. The research subjects were three account on Instagram such as @rentmate.id, @sewapacaronline.id, and @rntl.pacar_id. The research subjects were selected with several criteria such as a) virtual lover rental services account on Instagram social media, b) having the number of Instagram account followers of 500-10,000, c) actively producing content related to virtual lover rental services, d) present on Instagram in the 2022-2023 timeframe. Each of these accounts also has unique cases of commodification of intimacy, a) @rentmate.id: the presence of voice recording content from both female and male talents, b) @sewapacaronline.id: the presence of playing game together products in addition to virtual lover rental services, c) @rntl.pacar_id: other services are displayed through content in the form of special virtual lover rental services packages during ramadan.

Researchers used data collection techniques such as interviews during of September to October 2024. The researcher conducted interviews with three owners, three male talents, and three female talents from the three virtual lover service accounts. The interviews lasted between one to two hours and were conducted via Zoom meetings or WhatsApp calls to ensure the privacy and comfort of the informants. In addition to interviews, the researcher also collected data through observation by examining the content dynamics on the relevant Instagram accounts and hiring male talents both online and offline, based on mutually agreed ethical guidelines. In processing the data, the researcher used thoughts from Creswell and Poth (2018) in the form of managing and organizing data, reading and recording emerging ideas, deciphering and classifying codes into themes,

developing and assessing interpretations, to explaining and visualizing data. Meanwhile, in analyzing the data, Stake's (1995) data analysis technique and direct interpretation were used while checking the validity of the data. Cross-case triangulation was used to compare patterns across the three accounts, and member checking was conducted by confirming preliminary interpretations with informants. Informant data information related to the name of talent is public information that has been published by the Instagram account. Ethical procedures were followed, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. To enhance methodological rigor, the study addressed trustworthiness through measures such as member checking, detailed contextual descriptions, and systematic documentation of research decisions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Work process in account is closely related to collective actions that are mutually carried out as an audience. Talent becomes the main worker who plays the role of a “rented” virtual lover and as an account commodity. The discussion in this sub-chapter focuses on talent as the core party in the exchange of intimacy in the virtual lover rental relationship. In this sub-chapter, the researcher explains absolute exploitation related to the facts behind the flexibility of working hours, the orientation of “having fun” to, and private transaction also relative exploitation about the demands of multi-tasking, talent exploitation, and emotionally touched. This study demonstrates that commodified intimacy is co-produced through affective, temporal, physical, and ideological negotiations between account owners and talents. These findings advance theoretical discussions on digital labor of intimacy by highlighting how power, control, and negotiation shape commodified relationships. They also carry practical implications for platform governance and digital labor protection, suggesting that clearer regulations and guidelines could ensure fair working conditions, contractual transparency, and safeguards for the personal and emotional well-being of talents in virtual lover services.

Behind the claims of flexible working hours and a “have fun” orientation (absolute exploitation)

The absolute exploitation section that reveals the dynamics of flexible working hours and the “have fun” orientation consists of several issues, namely (a) revealing exploitation: irregular working hours and contract ambiguity, (b) control over wages and the illusion of TIP giving, and (c) private transaction: suing the account’s power by the talent.

Exposing exploitation: irregular working hours and contract ambiguity

In the context of the labor, talents work in flexible time frames and contracts. N owner @sewapacaronline.id explained that talent's working hours are adjusted to customer orders. Offline dating with a limit of 19.00 WIB and in online dating, talents must be ready according to orders, especially maintaining communication until late at night. As for contracts, talents are free to decide to leave at any time. Peachy owner@rentmate.id also stated that the working hours of its talents are flexible. However, for offline dating within the time range of 08.00 – 23.00 WIB. In online dating, the hours depend on the order. Regarding the talent contract, the talent is free to leave and the account has the authority to release the talent at any time. A owner @rntl.pacar_id sets a time limit for offline dating, which is a time span of 10:00 - 22:00 WIB. While online dating adjusts between talent improvement and customers. The talent contract is free with the flexibility to leave, but the account will not accept the talent again.

An interesting finding came from Cece talent @rentmate.id regarding the flexibility of the contract that she had stopped then became active again. However, she did not place a profile on the account account. She worked according to her old customer's order and the owner's recommendation. Meanwhile, Justin talent @rentmate.id once experienced problems with working hours. He once asked for a day off and did not accept orders. However, with the request of the customer and owner who were given confirmation 2 hours before, he still had to work.

“I once got an order even though I told the owner that I was off. The customer insisted on wanting me. The owner asked me to accept it, the confirmation was made suddenly 2 hours before. Even though I was very busy, I was forced to do it.” (Results of an interview via Whatsapp call with Justin – Male Talent @rentmate.id on October 4, 2024)

Based on the findings of the owner interview, there is power and control over the talent. Regarding the working hours of offline dating, the three owners provide a time span limit, such as @rentmate.id 08.00-23.00 WIB, @rntl.pacar_id 10.00-22.00 WIB, and @sewapacaronline.id the starting time fluctuates with a limitation of 19.00 WIB. These working hours are related to the production process that begins when there is a work agreement, namely workers as commodities and means of production (Mosco, 2009). Even so, customers are free to extend the time when offline dating without prior confirmation. This shows uncertainty for talents and must stay, even though it is not in accordance with the initial agreement. Talent is placed to fulfill customer desires and personal freedom is set aside.

Meanwhile, online dating working hours are free and adjust to customers. The flexibility of working hours is used by account to exploit talent so that they are ready at any time. According to Mosco (2009), in the commodification of labor there is a process of placing workers in institutional spaces as transacted commodities. In the @sewapacaronline.id account, talents are required to stay awake late at night to communicate with customers. That the flexibility of work in the digital space is accompanied by longer working hours that blur the border between work and play (Lodovici et al., 2021; Rani & Furrer, 2020). Talent ultimately has difficulty enjoying exclusive personal time, exacerbating uncertainty, and blurring the boundaries between the personal and professional arenas. Flexible working hours exacerbate uncertainty and dissolve boundaries in personal and professional arenas.

The freedom of talent contracts in the three account is more beneficial to the account than the talent. The loose ties between the account and the talent mean that the account does not need to be responsible for the talent's welfare and performance maintenance. The account is free to accept talent resignations and has the authority to dismiss the talent at any time. In this commodification process, talent becomes the account's property that is easy to recruit and dismiss, thus showing objectification through the ownership level (Nussbaum, 1995). This condition presents a vulnerable working atmosphere where talent does not have proper protection for their profession. Talent is treated as a commodity that is easily replaced with the account's orientation towards short-term profitability rather than creating continuous relationships. Even talents seem to have no certainty about the future of their career as a talent because there is no patent on the contract that they have.

There are interesting findings from Cece talent @rentmate.id related to contract dynamics. Where it shows the owner's control over himself through the freedom of the contract to be off and on at any time and his desire not to go public. Although this freedom seems to uphold the rights of talent, behind it there is a power relationship for capital. The owner plays a role in marketing it through recommendations to customers for the talent's willingness, even though there is no profile on the account. This context shows that talent becomes a tool for gaining profit that is intertwined with objectification through instrumentality (Nussbaum, 1995) wrapped in the illusion of freedom. This dynamic triggers injustice towards other talents because it is based on the owner's subjectivity to the talent. That the owner is able to market and bring more orders for the talents she likes, thus creating inequality for talents who may be less favored by her.

On the other hand, Justin talent @rentmate.id explained his complaints about working hours. When it was a holiday, he was required to accept sudden orders with confirmation from the owner 2 hours before. This confirms the closeness of absolute exploitation, namely extending the working day (Mosco, 2009) with the requirement for talent to be active on holidays. This condition shows a lack of appreciation by the account for the personal boundaries of the talent. Although the talent has provided a border, the account exceeds it by focusing on profit. In the realm of commodification, this shows that the personal needs of the talent are not considered. The account interprets talent as a tool to fulfill customer requests, without examining the impact on the talent. In the end, talents are forced to work and prioritize their personal space in order to adjust to the owner's demands and get a salary.

So, in this issue, it is seen that the account is the party that benefits greatly, especially regarding the flexibility of talent's working hours. That the accounts are able to take advantage of this flexibility which blurs the boundaries between the professional and private realms of talent for profit. The flexibility of the contract also makes the account not obliged to maintain the welfare or future of

the talent's career. Through this dynamic, the talent becomes the party that is quite disadvantaged by the portion of working time and the turn to get orders that are not clear. Even the inequality of "quotas" to receive orders between talents can occur which is intertwined with the account's subjectivity to certain talents.

Control over wages and the illusion of TIP (to insure promptness)

Talents get salary from customer payment result which is cut by some percentage by the account. As explained by Peachy owner @rentmate.id that she receives customer payment and gives 25% cut as talent salary. TIP is given entirely by the account to the talent. N owner @sewapacaronline.id admitted that he cut a few percent of the total customer payment. He emphasized that talents are not intended to work for money. In fact, talents are applied to the principle of having fun through their profession.

In the account @rntl.pacar_id, A as the owner stated a cut of around 30-35% for talent salary from the total customer payment. TIP is left to be received in full by the talent. The owner also directs the talent not to make their profession their main source of income. Looking at the findings from the context of talent, Dara talent @rentmate.id stated that she does not prioritize money. That her orientation as a talent is only to gain new experiences by relating to many people.

Fadhil talent @rntl.pacar_id said something different, he objected to the account's deductions from customer payments so he had to accept every order. However, by getting TIP, he felt at home working as a talent at the account.

“The goal of joining is to get extra pocket money. The account cut is quite good. So it feels good, I keep saying yes if I get an order. I still want to do this because if I get a TIP, it's for me.” (Results of an interview via WhatsApp call with Fadhil – Male talent @rntl.pacar_id on October 6, 2024)

Account practicing through power relations that customer payments are fully received by the owner. Talent's salary becomes the result of deductions from the total customer payment. At the @rentmate.id account there is a 25% deduction, @rntl.pacar_id 30-35%, while the owner of @sewapacaronline.id chooses not to mention the amount. Although the deduction is a reward for the talent, it actually shows the account's control over the talent's income. This condition leads the talent to financial dependence on feelings of inadequacy to always work in claims of flexibility. The deduction shows the activity of maintaining talent's attachment by being lulled by the goal of having fun. This is part of the practice of labor exploitation which Mosco (2009) stated as a form of labor commodification. At the end, the account has full control over the talent's salary and the talent has no power to question it so they fully accept the decision.

Regarding TIP, the three owners give 100% freedom for TIP to be accepted by the talent. Although the activity is seen as a form of appreciation given by the account. However, this can be a strategy that presents an illusion related to talent being able to gain more benefits from work mediated by the account. Based on findings from Fadhil regarding the desire to stay as a talent, it further strengthens the account's narrative that the talent profession is fun and profitable. In fact, salary deductions are still made which continuously reduce their income. These dynamics position the talent to be lulled, need an account, enthusiastic about working for TIP which is an objectification in the form of denial of subjectivity (Nussbaum, 1995). The feeling of pleasure obtained through additional money and goods seems to make talents “addicted” and “devote” themselves to working as talents.

From several talents interviewed, the obvious finding from Dara talent account @sewapacaronline.id who considers her job to gain experience. Although she stated that she is not oriented towards money, but unknowingly her orientation becomes a gap for the account in asserting control to continue salary deductions. Of course, the account will avoid protests and requests for a reduction in deductions because the talent is not fixated on the amount of salary. In the end, the commodification process that is oriented towards the transformation of use value into exchange value related to purchases, sales, to the consumption of intimacy increasingly creates a flow of capital (Mosco, 2009; Constable, 2009). The account benefits from the principle of talent and the talent feels that they are not disadvantaged, even though in reality there is exploitation. Talent tends to be adjusted to the process of having fun as a job and doesn't really think about the problems in it so they don't realize that they are becoming an “object” of exploitation.

In addition to the talent who agreed to the salary cut, Fadhil actually explained his objection to the 30-35% cut in his salary. As a talent @rntl.pacar_id, he felt lacking in income. This is relevant to his job orientation for additional income. This condition is intertwined with account that take advantage of talent's dependence on additional income to make a profit. Although it does not indicate extending work, this situation is part of absolute exploitation wrapped in flexibility and makes talents agree to all orders for the sake of income (Mosco, 2009; Lodovici et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the account has full decisions so that talents with concerns about salary have no say in determining it. Therefore, talents have no other choice to refuse orders that come to them because orders are not always present and for the sake of additional income.

Therefore, through this issue it is seen that the account gets “pleasure” in the form of large profits from its power relations. The accounts earn large income through deductions from the talent’s salary by a large amount. The accounts also create financial dependence through the illusion of pleasure from TIP. In this situation, the talent becomes the party that is harmed, especially because of the deductions that reduce their income significantly. That the talent does not have the power to change the system related to salary deductions that are fair to both parties. They are also involved in providing TIP which is a manipulation tool so that the talent can be bound to work “happily”.

Private transaction: suing the account's power by the talent

Outside the accounts arena, it is not uncommon for talents to conduct private transactions, they are accepting virtual lover rental orders between themselves and customers directly. As stated by Peachy, owner of @rentmate.id account, there are talents who carry out private transactions and are difficult for the account to monitor. Although this puts the talent at risk, the account is not responsible for anything that happens to the talent when he is involved in a relationship outside the account's knowledge.

“What's hard to monitor are private transactions. They usually receive orders from customers who have ordered something like that, but they don't report it to the account. That puts themselves at risk, sis. If it's a private transaction, I'm not responsible, whether you want to be terrorized or anything else is none of my business.” (Results of interview via WhatsApp call with Peachy - Owner @rentmate.id on October 4, 2024)

Meanwhile, Fadhil of @rntl.pacar_id talent account explained that he is open to receiving private transactions from customers. This is based on a fee without deductions when compared to the salary from the account. He sets the same price as at the account, but the orders received are no longer through the account.

From several interviews with account owners, only one owner of the @rentmate.id account provided information about the dynamics of private transactions by his talents. In fact, talents are freed to receive orders outside the account, but the account is not responsible and interferes with the talent's business with the customer. This condition shows that account tend to utilize talents without providing proper protection. Talents experience objectification in the form of denial of subjectivity (Nussbaum, 1995) which is part of labor exploitation (Mosco, 2009) that they are transacted for profit as if they have no feelings to be considered. The account releases talents to engage in personal transactions with the burden of consequences without the provision of support. Even though talents are capable of engaging in various threats such as mental, physical, and related to personal privacy.

The only talent who opened up to share his personal transactions was Fadhil from the account @rntl.pacar_id. The narrative of openness is full of tendencies of financial dissatisfaction from account control. Talent creates a way to get out of the account's limitations, while reflecting a response to the powerlessness of the system within it. Talent as workers are seen to be highly utilized as commodities that are constantly transacted to customers (Mosco, 2009). Although the account has the control to hire and manage talent, but with the existence of private transactions, it can be said that the account's “restraints” are starting to fade. That the talent is actively able to challenge the power relations within the account. In the end, private transactions by talents without the account's knowledge sparked a debate over the legitimacy of the account's control over talents.

Thus, profit in this issue refers to @rentmate.id and @rntl.pacar_id accounts that abdicate responsibility for talent, especially for private transactions. Where the accounts put them in order to reap profits without providing empathy for the protection of workers. Meanwhile, talents become the losers because they are shackled in an unfair situation. Talents must take responsibility for the consequences they receive without the support of the account. It can be said that talents are trapped in power relations that place them as commodities to be traded, without being fully understood as individuals.

The demands of multi-tasking and exploitation of talent in claims of freedom (relative exploitation)

In the section relative exploitation which examines the demands of multi-tasking and the exploitation of talent through claims of freedom, consists of several issues in the form of (a) emotional manipulation and self-negotiation of talent for the sake of artificial intimacy, (b) emulti-tasking expectations in an arena of uncertainty, and (c) emotionally touched: between self-passion and account control.

Emotional manipulation and self-negotiation of talent for artificial intimacy

Although talent is freed by the account to serve outside of 18+, in reality there is a dynamic of coercion that burdens the talent. As felt by Justin talent @rentmate.id that he is tired of maintaining the customer's mood, especially when he has personal problems. Fadhil talent @rntl.pacar_id also felt forced even though the account handed over the service to the talent. Often there is a lack of compatibility and interest, but treatment must be given by pretending to like the customer and optimizing the service.

Peachy owner @rentmate.id explained his efforts to make talent stay with customers even though they feel uncomfortable. He has the control to give direction, especially responding to talent complaints when offline dating.

"When dating offline, the talent was once annoyed by the customer, communicated to me. I said, wait 1 hour to finish. I asked to behave, don't get carried away by a bad mood. If it's weird, I told them to report to the security guard." (Results of an interview via Whatsapp call with Peachy - Owner @rentmate.id on October 4, 2024)

There are findings that question intervention account towards the construction of self and talent ideology. A owner @rntl.pacar_id stated that female talents have flexibility in dressing according to customer requests. Although in the content they wear the hijab, when offline dating they can take off the hijab. While findings regarding body negotiation were also present, Peachy owner @rentmate.id admitted that there were customer requests to him regarding the clothes that the talent should wear. There was a request for female talents to wear a sharia robe, even the talent had to buy it because they did not have the clothes.

Based on the findings from the interview, only Justin and Fadhil provided information about their complaints at work. In the claim of talent's freedom to provide service, there is actually a burden on the psychological level for the talent. When the talent's condition is unstable and does not match the customer, he must suppress these feelings in order to provide optimal service to the customer. Even when the talent feels less preference towards the customer, he should try to ignore his feelings to still create an optimal professional romantic relationship. That latently, talents are required to be able to build active communication to involve physical interaction, especially in offline dating. In line with Register and Henley (1992) that nonverbal communication has an important role as a complement to interaction in creating intimacy.

The presence of manipulation of feelings by talent by "seemingly" liking customers so that the imagination of a genuine dating relationship is created. That boundary is part of the process of creating intimacy through the elimination of boundaries between individuals and presenting a feeling of "specialness" (Register & Henley, 1992; Jamieson, 2005). The personal emotional dynamics felt by the talent are set aside to create an impressive professional romantic relationship. The treatment that is freed by the account becomes a cover to guarantee customer satisfaction above the welfare of the talent. This shows that the talent's emotions play a role as a tool to achieve commercial goals, not interpreted as a central aspect of their personal authority. Talent is always intertwined with emotional burdens that are always regulated and borne by themselves.

Account with full control acting as a talent work activity regulator, although it is claimed that talent work is flexible. From Peachy's interview findings, it can be seen that she has the power to give instructions regarding talent actions. Although it is claimed that the talent's work is flexible, the talent's service to the customer is inseparable from the account's intervention. Talents who actually feel uncomfortable are "forced" to stay according to the hours and activities that have been ordered. Talents are placed to prioritize customer needs, even when they feel uncomfortable. Borrowing Mosco's (2009) thinking that the commodification of labor involves the process of utilizing workers as transacted commodities. This control shows the power structure in work relations, especially how the account dominates the actions and decisions of talent.

On the other hand, interview findings A, showed that female talents can take off their hijab when offline dating that does not match the content on Instagram. Meanwhile, interview findings Peachy, talents become the party that fulfills customer requests in dressing, for example wearing a sharia robe even though the talent has to buy the clothes. Talents are placed to fulfill customer pleasure, even though they have to abandon their ideology and negotiate their bodies. That the elements that are principled in the talent are also melted and transacted for the sake of profit obtained from the customer. Account also exploits the personal financial aspects of talents in serving customers. Account also control the principal aspects of talents in order to create artificial intimacy through denial of autonomy as objectification (Nussbaum, 1995).

So, in this issue it is seen that the accounts reap profits through the exploitation of emotions, time, body, and even the talent's finances. With claims of job flexibility, the accounts actually strengthen control in service activities by the talent. That the accounts always maximize profits accompanied by the absence of responsibility for the welfare of the talent. Therefore, the talents are positioned as the party that bears the burden, namely the loss of self-autonomy to psychological pressure. Their self-ideology and body are always transacted through account control. This shows that talents as commodity is "required" to submit to the logic of capital in the exploitative arena.

Multi-tasking expectations in an arena of uncertainty

In the freedom of service, talents are faced with multi-tasking. Aris talent @sewapacaronline.id, he acts complexly such as protecting and advising customers by making it relevant that women are considered to need a place to "hang on". He also provides a special call, time for calls, and WhatsApp chat emoticons. Devi talent @rntl.pacar_id stated that she was uncomfortable when she received spam chat from customers. This is a demand to always be present to communicate, in addition to her personal activities. She still tries to provide service according to customer wishes, even though she feels it is difficult.

Meanwhile, Farhan talent @rntl.pacar_id had felt confused in doing the ramadan package service. This is due to the difference in hours and sleeping habits to communicate to wake up sahur. However, he had to adjust and complete the service obligation. Another finding from Justin talent @rentmate.id who has to divide his role and identity where it relates to his relationship status in real life. He has to be professional to be a talent and ignore his personal relationship. While when he is in a real relationship, he chooses to take a break.

"I have a boyfriend, the account knows. It's important for the role, I hide it from my boyfriend. Off-days if I want to go out, request it. Stay professional, attentive, call me darling, send PAP, stickers-emoticons. Offline dating, hold hands, hug, fix shoelaces." (Results of interview via Whatsapp call with Justin – Male Talent @rentmate.id on October 4, 2024)

According to the findings of interviews, there is relative exploitation (Mosco, 2009) by requiring workers to be versatile. In the context of Aris, he plays a role in protecting and nurturing female customers. In the context of Aris, she must have various roles to nurture, advise, and even protect customers. This is intertwined with his idea that female customers need a dominant figure to lean on. There is a dating pattern with the continuity of the dominant male role and passive female role (Zheng, 2019). Talents must also improvise in building communication with special calls and making time to make phone calls. The time aspect is part of intimacy related to individuals presenting experiences within a certain range (Register & Henley, 1992). The ability to improvise has the potential for account profit where talents are "forced" to always be ready. Talents become vulnerable to sacrificing personal time and mental stability for customer expectations.

In Dara's context, she was disturbed when the customer spammed chat so that the talent was always available. Meanwhile, the talent had a busy schedule that had been announced to the customer. The talent was still "forced" to fulfill the customer's wishes, even though the account argued that the job description was flexible. There is an aspect of presence in the formation of intimacy (Register & Henley, 1992) related to the presence of talent in exclusive communication in virtual space. This dynamic triggers a burden on the talent because they have to meet customer expectations, while the account takes profit from multi-tasking capabilities. This condition further strengthens the logic of commodification that is oriented towards changing use value to exchange value (Mosco, 2009) for profit. From Devi's context, the account did not intervene to protect the talent from situations that could cause stress.

Looking at the findings from Farhan, he faced challenges in the Ramadan package in the service of waking up for sahur and saying iftar. However, talents have difficulty in adjusting the customer's waking hours and habits. This condition shows that talents are forced to work in a space of uncertainty. The account does not provide the right information to support talent performance based on jobdesc flexibility. This further confirms the lack of support from the account for the actualization of the role of talent. Talent becomes a central party in the commodification process and devotes itself to creating value during the formation of the consumption experience (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Talents carry out work by relying on their own abilities, without a support mechanism from the account for talents. This further confirms the lack of support from the account for the actualization of the talent's role.

Meanwhile, Justin's findings show the complexity of identity and role that he who has a real girlfriend must be professional while working. In addition to "dating" through offline dating, talents provide online services via WhatsApp. The presence of affectionate calls, sending PAPs (post a picture), stickers and emoticons means that talent has to suppress some personality and make the intimacy created less authentic. The experience of intimacy involves the use of media based on the nature of the platform to its modality (Lomanowska et al., 2016). When going to spend time with a real partner, talents must ask for leave. Where the account has exclusive control over the talent's time so that the flexibility of self-empowerment can be intervened. The account uses the talent's adaptability for profit, but the effects of mentality and identity problems are not considered.

Thus, the accounts benefit from the sacrifices borne by the talent through multi-tasking capabilities. Where the account has workers who can be assigned at any time, without the need for certain investments in development. The accounts also have power with the talent's working hours which are claimed to be flexible so that transactions can be maximized. However, the talents become the part that is harmed through the closeness of the power relationship in the work in the virtual lover rental service. Talents experience psychological burdens, uncertainty jobdesc, exploitation of personal time, and instability of self-identity. These conditions further strengthen the existence of an exploitative hierarchy in work relations.

Emotionally touched: between self-passion and account control

When in a professional romantic relationship, the totality of the talent's role often creates an emotional bond with the customer. Aris talent @sewapacaronline.id said that he got carried away with feelings for the customer, even though this was prohibited by the account. He had to find a way to divert his feelings. However, the existence of "baper" is able to make customers place repeat orders to talents.

Just like Aris, Justin talent @rentmate.id shared the feeling of mutual "emotionally touched" between himself and the customer. In the end, they became close outside of a professional romantic relationship. The account owner who knows also tends to ignore by throwing insults in a joking manner. Despite the account's release and the talent's regret, the "emotionally touched" condition makes the customer repeat orders to the talent.

"I once felt sorry for a customer, until we met and communicated outside the contract. Wow, when I was unfamiliar, it felt so weird. The owner knew, especially my friend, so I told him. He told me 'you're a moron', and I thought how stupid I am. But, if the customer is upset, they will order again to the account. I deliberately made them feel sorry for me, even though in the end it was me who was drawn to feel sorry for the customer." (Interview result through Whatsapp call with Justin - Male Talent @rentmate.id on October 4, 2024)

From the findings of interviews with many talents, only Aris talent @sewapacaronline and Justin talent @rentmate.id are willing to present information on the “emotionally touched” experience to customers. When talent establishes a professional romantic relationship with customers, it is full of ambiguity. Talent works in an emotional state that leads to emotional attachment and can be detrimental to mental stability. Accounts tend to utilize this vulnerability for capital in the orientation of customer comfort. These conditions trigger customers to maximize their pleasure and immerse themselves in the consumption experience (Celsi et al., 1993). This is related to when emotional attachment can be established, it makes customers order again and increases account profits. Here it appears that talent is a commodity that is traded (Mosco, 2009) at any time to the customer when needed. Meanwhile, the talent is forced to regulate the boundaries of professionalism and personal, without the help of the account.

Ultimately, the presence of “ambiguity” in the relationship between talent and customer can create an internal culture that emotional engagement is the ideal form of work. Work as a talent is characterized by the creation of intimacy that involves close relationships between individuals involved in the formation of relational value (Jamieson, 2011). In claiming flexible job descriptions, the reality is that account subtly encourage talents to actively build emotional attachments for customer convenience. Instead of being an arena to have fun, talents get an additional burden related to dualism in the form of totality and maintaining personal boundaries. Moreover, the account does not provide assistance for talents in dealing with and getting out of the emotional attachment zone from customers. This condition further confirms that the intimacy presented is very much interpreted as a service in the account's power to gain profit.

Therefore, through this issue, it can be seen that the @sewapacaronline.id and @rentmate.id accounts are the ones who benefit from the presence of feelings between talents and customers. This attachment brings the potential for repeat orders by customers, thus increasing the account's income. Meanwhile, the account is not responsible for the emotional dynamics felt by the talent and focuses on the quantity of capital generated. In this condition, the talent becomes the part that is shaded by losses, especially at the emotional level. They are required to have closeness with customers with the risk of personal emotional involvement. They must also try to build boundaries and eliminate their feelings independently without account intervention.

CONCLUSION

The research conducted on the commodification of intimacy by the account, shows that in the Instagram social media space, the accounts @rentmate.id, @sewapacaronline.id, and @rntl.pacar_id, always carry out the commodification of intimacy through the level of labor. By utilizing modalities on Instagram, the account also commodifies intimacy through the commodification of labor. The logic of capital surrounds the commodification activities carried out by the accounts in order to create profits by transacting feelings to the body. From the results of the research, the researcher draws a conclusion that labor commodification occurs against talents which are classified into absolute exploitation and relative exploitation. In absolute exploitation, talent as workers are controlled by the account with irregular working hours and contract ambiguity. Through flexibility, talents are lulled with TIP rights and a have fun orientation at work. Talents also conduct private transactions that they are receiving rental orders between themselves and the customer directly.

Meanwhile, relative exploitation is seen with the demands of multi-tasking to the exploitation of talents through the claim of freedom. Accounts often bring talents into the space of emotional manipulation and self-negotiation of body and ideology in order to create artificial intimacy. Talents are often involved in romantic relationships with customers because of the totality of their roles. Even talents are expected to be “versatile” and are charged with the risk of getting carried away with feelings for customers. In the level of commodification of labor, account benefit through the flexibility of working hours and contracts to be able to exploit talents for profit. The ideology of self and body of the talent is also transacted in order to serve the customer's pleasure.

This study has certain data limitations, including the focus on only a few talents within the accounts, limited exploration of triangulation, and platform specificity, as it examines only Instagram. Therefore, future research could investigate a more diverse range of talents across multiple

accounts and consider other digital platforms. Additionally, subsequent studies could explore policy directions, platform regulations, and ethical dynamics within digital workspaces.

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