Commodification through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation

Azzumar Adhitia Santika[1], Yasmin Alvina[2]
[1]Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa
[2]LSPR Institute of Communication and Business

ABSTRACT

Recent commodification studies primarily focus on what is commodified, often overlooking how it is delivered through exaggerated narratives within the Indonesian YouTube industry. Using Vincent Mosco's work on commodification, this qualitative research aims to analyze how Atta Halilintar (AH), a prominent figure and one of the biggest powers in the industry, employs exaggerated narratives as a deliberate tool for commodifying information into exchange value, specifically to make the content more appealing and entertaining. The data of this research were gathered from the four most-viewed of AH's *'Grebek Rumah'* videos. We use multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to analyze the data from its titles, thumbnails, photography compositions, and conversations. The results show that exaggerated narratives cannot only be seen as a deliberate tool to make content more appealing and entertaining. Beyond that, this tool also has capital interests and follows market logic. This means content that might be perceived as inappropriate will continue to be produced as long as it is still widely consumed/watched. However, unethical use of this tool, such as intentionally presenting misleading information, can damage the creator's reputation. Thus, the digital content creators must be aware of and use this deliberate tool ethically, rather than only focusing on maximizing capital potential. For theoretical contributions, we suggest exaggerated narratives to be considered as an important aspect in content commodification, and suggest future research to pay more attention to its use in other platforms.

Keywords: *exaggerated narratives, commodification, political economy of communication, YouTube, Atta Halilintar*

INTRODUCTION

In the middle of July 2024, the public was surprised by a statement from Tompi, a well-known Indonesian singer and surgeon. The singer on a television talk show stated that Atta Halilintar (AH), a top Indonesian YouTuber, had provided invalid information about his house (Metro TV, 2024). In his YouTube content, his team wrote that Tompi's house was valued at IDR 150 billion. However, Tompi never revealed the number to AH.

> "This is a stupidity created by a content creator. They wrote that. I was
> very upset with his team because, on their YouTube channel, they wrote

.

205

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

that the price of the house was IDR 150 billion, not IDR 100 billion (as questioned before by the interviewer). Then I asked them 'Where did you get the number? Did I ever spill it?' (and they respond) 'No, it was just for fun". Wasn't that crazy? The tax officer called me after that," said Tompi on Metro TV Q&A Programme, 8th of July, 2024

According to the facts above, we can identify two things. Firstly, AH commodifies Tompi's personal information about his house into content. Commodification is a process of transforming use value, including information, into exchange value (Mosco, 2009). Secondly, in the process of commodifying it, he also exaggerates the narratives to make it more appealing and entertaining.

Exaggerating is an action in delivering the story beyond its real event, with the motive to entertain the audience (Cole & Beike, 2019). The exaggerated narration also has the purpose of bolding the media's message (Gultekin-Akcay, 2021). AH's exaggerated action revealed by Tompi indicates that there might be similar practices in the other content, particularly in the content of *Grebek Rumah*. *Grebek Rumah* is a YouTube channel where AH visits public figures' houses and showcases their luxurious lifestyle (see AH, 2024).

According to recent data, YouTube ranks as the second most-used media platform in Indonesia after WhatsApp, with Indonesians spending an average of 26.4 hours per month on the platform. It stands as the top social media choice for video consumption, with 96.9% of Indonesians using it to watch videos. YouTube also holds the highest potential as an advertising medium among social media platforms in the country, offering access to approximately 139 million people, while 67.9% of Indonesian internet users regularly watch YouTube channels (Yunus et al, 2023).

This phenomenon on YouTube channel also shows that AH is always close to the sensation and the critique. More than four years ago, Pramesti (2019) stated that AH's content that contains pranks, low-quality comedy, daily vlogging, and visiting public figures' houses has no educational aspect. The same critique was also communicated in a satirical way by two comedians, Tretan Muslim and Coki Pardede, on Majelis Lucu's YouTube Channel (2018). In another case, the chairman of PW PERGUNU (The Teacher Association of Nahdlatul Ulama/*Persatuan Guru Nahdlatul Ulama*) Papua, Fritz Haryadi, said AH's content is an antithesis of character education and this is an irony since his audience is dominated by teenagers (Wardhani, 2021).

However, all those critiques pay less attention to scientific approaches. Thus, the need to deepen the critiques scientifically has emerged. Moreover, AH can be classified as one of the biggest powers in Indonesia's YouTube industry, since he is also listed as one of the richest YouTubers in the world (Nurhaliza, 2024). Including some awards he received, such as the Diamond Play Button from YouTube and the Favorite Content Creator from the 2023 Indonesia Award (Eriyawati et al., 2020; Nurhaliza, 2024). Ironically, according to the cases we mentioned, he does not use the power ethically.

206

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

Critical research related to it was found in Syahputra's work (2022), which highlighted how AH commodifies his wedding as content. The attendance of Indonesia's seventh president, Joko Widodo, and Indonesia's eighth president, Prabowo Subianto, gives the content a pretty high news value. The research has shown that commodification is a common practice by AH. However, there is insufficient research on the commodification practice in AH's *Grebek Rumah* content. Specifically, the related research pays detailed attention to the use of exaggerated narratives as a deliberate tool in order to maximize the commodification process.

Recent research related to AH tends to be dominated by positive points of view. Yudha (2020) stressed that AH can be seen as an agent that reconstructs the ideal career definition for the youth, from being a civil servant, police, or soldier to being a YouTuber. In addition, some research also shows that AH is perceived positively by his audience, ranging from student college to wider society audience segmentation (Putra et al., 2021; Sufri et al., 2022). His loyal audience perceives him as a motivational figure (Eriyawati et al., 2020).

The previous research mentioned above reinforces that the topic of exaggerated narratives in content commodification within AH's *Grebek Rumah* is still underexplored. The difference between this research and Syahputra's work (2022) is that Syahputra focuses on the commodification of AH's wedding ceremony, while this research focuses on the commodification practice in the *Grebek Rumah* content. Another novelty that the authors offer from this research is drawing attention to the exaggerated narratives in the commodification process as a deliberate tool to maintain the creator's capital. Simultaneously, this concept is less highlighted in recent general commodification research.

Vincent Mosco's view on commodification in the political economy of communication (2009) will be used as the main analytical tool. Subsequently, the exaggerated narratives in the commodification process will be holistically analyzed through the multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) method, as it helps the researcher to see and criticize a discourse from various aspects (Berger, 2016). Thus, this research aims to answer the following research questions: How do exaggerated narratives, as a deliberate tool in the *Grebek Rumah* content commodification practice, help AH maintain his capital? And how can this action affect the creator's reputation?

LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND
a. Mosco's Commodification and Exaggerated Narratives
Commodification is the process of transforming use value into exchange value (Mosco, 2009). Nowadays, there is a claim that everything can be commodified (Hall, 2023). However, Mosco (2009) classified commodification, specifically in the context of the political economy of communication, into three categories: Content commodification, audience commodification, and labor commodification.

In a simple explanation, content commodification occurs when the use value of a message is transformed into a marketable product, while audience commodification,

207

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

or audience labor, is when the audience who consumes the content is sold to advertisers (Mosco, 2009). In other words, audience commodification is about attracting advertisers with good ratings (Wahzudin et al., 2023). Lastly, labor commodification is applied when workers are exploited (Amallah et al., 2024).

Mosco adopted Marx's explanation about the complexity of commodification as a critical concept. A computer, for example, might be seen by consumers as just a tool. However, there is a hidden power-relation process, such as the relationship between the capital and its workers. Including potential exploitation that might happen behind that relationship (Mosco, 2009). Resonate to Hall (2023), today, everything can be commodified. Including content on the internet. This means there is also a hidden power-relation behind the production of internet content, including in the YouTube industry.

In the last five years, there have been several studies on commodification practices in various areas or contexts, both globally and nationally in Indonesia. In the context of sports, Zaucha & Agur (2024) explained how NBA fans are commodified by the blockchain-based website Dapper Labs. While in religious and educational contexts, Hidayah (2021) shows how pesantren are now aware of the growing middle-class segment in Indonesia, and follow market logic in their education services.

Media might be considered as the primary focus for the studies of commodification within the context of the political economy of communication, due to numerous studies in this area. In news production, evidence suggests that the media commodify various elements to increase profit. KompasTV and iNewsTV, as explained by Wahzudin et al., (2023), engaged in content and audience commodification practices related to the murder of Brigadier Yoshua, a case involving former Head of the Indonesian Police's Professionalism and Security Division, Ferdy Sambo. The same logic is also implied in advertising activity, while brands are using certain narration, such as banal nationalism, to make the message in the media more attractive (Fawzy & Rokhman, 2024).

Muslikhin et al. (2021) holistically explained how the commodification of content, audience, and labor, as well as spatialization and structuration, occur in the sphere of social media. They argue that social media makes its living by selling information or by commodifying it. The same mechanism also occurs on YouTube, as this platform, according to Ørmen & Gregersen (2023), facilitates the process. An example of this development is Raun's work (2018), which focuses on micro-celebrity and affective labor on YouTube.

In Indonesian YouTube context, Badrus Zaman & Assarwani (2021) describe how Habib Jafar (a young religious figure in Indonesia) commodifies his da'wa activity on YouTube by cultivating an image of himself as a pious young man while maintaining a millennial identity. The objective is to make his da'wa activity effective and relevant to the segment of the millennial audience. In addition, Khairiyani (2022) deconstructs the commodification practiced by Deddy Corbuzier and explains how he compromises his integrity by following the flow of capitalism for his content. Both Deddy Corbuzier and

208

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

AH are classified as Indonesian top YouTubers. Therefore, our research can be seen as a continuation of Khairiyani's work (2022), which focuses on how an Indonesian content creator performs commodification.

Previously, Syahputra (2022) deconstructed commodification practices behind the wedding of AH and Aurel Hermansyah. It shows that commodification is not a new phenomenon in AH's production of media content. As the authors mentioned in the background of this research, commodification practices also potentially occur in his *Grebek Rumah* content. However, it has not yet been seriously analyzed. This is an academic gap that the authors aim to fill.

Moreover, existing research on commodification, including the studies mentioned above, often overlooks the role of exaggerated narratives. Therefore, this study aims to specifically focus on these exaggerated actions as a deliberate tool within the commodification process. Exaggeration, as defined by Cole & Beike (2019), is an activity of delivering a story beyond its real event.

Media often exaggerate their content to emphasize a specific message (Gultekin-Akcay, 2021). Interestingly, as long as the audience believes the message, they may not perceive the message as exaggerated (Neureiter et al., 2021). This suggests that exaggerated narratives, by entertaining the audience, can make them more accepting of potential falsehoods (Cole & Beike, 2019). Thus, by specifically focusing on exaggerated narratives, this study aims to complement previous commodification research as a significant continuation.

b. YouTuber Digital Persona and Reputation

Digital persona is the extension of an individual's identity on the internet (Olivero et al., 2020). In simple terms, it is one's face that we display online. This suggests that online activities reshape how individuals construct their digital identity (Moore et al., 2017).

YouTubers are driven by economic motives in creating and maintaining their digital identity, which is related to their digital persona. This is primarily due to how YouTubers construct their online persona by adapting to several factors, including audience preferences, monetization policies, and the platform's algorithm (Radu, 2021). Reinforcing this, Moore et al. (2017) stated that mediated persona, including on YouTube, operates under the modulation of commercial interest. Thus, a YouTuber persona serves as both economic capital and as Radu (2021) argues, social and cultural capital.

In addition, Olivero et al. (2020) argue that reputation also plays an important part in digital persona. Therefore, it is also related to public image, as reputation cannot be separated from it (Kriyantono, 2012; Maryani et al., 2020). This implies that every action undertaken, including every online activity, significantly influences the formation of one's public image (Wæraas, 2018), thereby directly impacting their reputation. In the online sphere, reputation is a highly essential component (Kurnia et al., 2021). Consequently, YouTubers must maintain a good reputation by ensuring ethical conduct.

METHODOLOGY

In general, there are two methodologies in communication research: quantitative and qualitative (Kriyantono, 2010). This research uses a qualitative methodology, which, in simple terms, relies on text and image data (Creswell, 2013). Even though qualitative researchers are often accused of "reading into" texts that are not there (Berger, 2016), this means that qualitative researchers aim to discover something beyond the text. The authors want to show and explain how AH, as a YouTuber, uses exaggerated narratives in commodifying his content in order to maintain his power in the industry. Meanwhile, this is also affecting his public image.

This research uses a critical approach due to its objective, which is explained above. A critical perspective also strongly aligns with Mosco's theory (Muslikhin et al., 2021). Therefore, this critical approach is suitable for this study.

The authors will use Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), due to its focus on critical manners (Berger, 2016). MCDA not only provides a systematic and critical way of learning language but also various texts, such as images, photographs, graphics, and the combination of those in the social context (Grobat, 2023). This aligned with what Machin & Mayr (2012) stated that meaning is not only communicated through language but also through other semiotic modes. Therefore, MCDA was developed to address this gap. MCDA aims to denaturalize representations of other modes of communication.

This method of analysis is highly appropriate for this research, which pays attention to YouTube content that contains all of those elements. Based on the explanation in the previous paragraph, we can also see that MCDA specifically allows for the excavation of commodification practices from the audiovisual elements of YouTube content, which is highly relevant to Mosco's theoretical framework. This includes analyzing how the exaggerated narratives are used in the commodification process.

The qualitative method also uses multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013). This research obtains its data from observation and documentation of audiovisual materials on AH's *Grebek Rumah* YouTube content. As mentioned before, the data will be analyzed through MCDA. The authors will not only focus on the title, tag, and thumbnail, which are crucial for content creators to promote their video's popularity (Hoiles et al., 2016) but also on the photography composition of the video, and of course, the conversation on it, since MCDA gives attention to any modes of communication.

The authors will pick the top four *Grebek Rumah* videos (according to the views) to be analyzed. Most viewed videos are selected as a sampling because the number of views is related to YouTubers' earnings (Chadha, 2025). In other words, it relates to the platform's political economy practices, with the political economy in the communication context being a significant focus of Mosco's work (Mosco, 2009). As mentioned before, this research will focus on four videos of AH's *Grebek Rumah*'s YouTube content that have the most views. The table below shows the top four videos of *Grebek Rumah*

210

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

content as of December 26th, 2024. These four videos are deemed adequate as a sample because they have reached the point of data saturation.

Table 1: Top videos of *Grebek Rumah* content according to the views on 26th December 2024.

Titles	Total Viewers	Total Likes
CINTA LAURA'S 3 HECTARES HOUSE!! FULL NEW STUDIO, VERY SPACIOUS #GrebekRumah (*RUMAH 3 HEKTAR CINTA LAURA!! FULL STUDIO BARU, LUAS BANGET!! #GrebekRumah*	4.277.081	62.000
NEW HOUSE OF CIPUNG'S RAFFI NAGITA!! LUXURIOUS FULL MARBLE!!! (*RUMAH BARU CIPUNG RAFFI NAGITA!! FULL MARMER MEWAH!!!*)	4.145.335	58.000
FUJI'S NEW HOUSE, Success in the age of 20 (*RUMAH BARU FUJI, Sukses di Usia 20 Tahun #GrebekRumah*)	3.271.674	76.000
100 BILLION APARTMENT OF NIKITA AND INDRA WILDLY LUXURIOUS.. The highest-paid soap opera actress (*APARTMENT 100M Nikita Indra GOKILL MEWAH.. Bayaran Sinetron Termahal*)	2.746.661	82.000

Source: AH, 2024

This research uses qualitative analysis stages as explained by Creswell (2013), which involves first preparing and organizing the data, then reducing it into themes through coding, and lastly, presenting the data. Based on those instructions, first, the author will prepare the data, which are the top four most-viewed videos as we mentioned in Table 1. In this stage, we will also organize the details such as the titles, thumbnails, and tags. After that, in the second stage, we will code every segment (including text, visual, and audio) into several labels, such as exaggerated words or claims, and also visual framing that deliberately showcases luxury. And in the final stage, we will present the data in a narrative description which enhanced with several screenshots from the videos, as well as some quotes from them. In presenting that narrative description, we will analyze it with Mosco's commodification theory as well as the concept of exaggerated narrative. The same data analysis technique was also used by Muslikhin et al. (2021) in uncovering the commodification, spatialization, and structuration of social media within Cyber Media News in Indonesia. Thus, this data analysis technique is appropriate to use in this study.

211

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Content Commodification of Wealth with Exaggerated Narratives

Content commodification in the Indonesian YouTube industry varies in a wide range of types, from religious (Badrus Zaman & Assarwani, 2021), culture (Nurhasanah et al., 2022), women's sexual appeal (Khairiyani, 2022), children (Nafsa & Zulhazmi, 2022), fear (Ariefaldy et al., 2024), and wealth, as AH often explores in his content. It shows that YouTube has become a big market for creators, specifically in Indonesia, to sell any kind of information into marketable content, as Mosco defined the concept of content commodification (Mosco, 2009). This is also deeply connected to the fact that YouTube, as a platform, persistently encourages its users to compete for seeking audience's attention and rewards them economically (Raun, 2018).

In order to attract the audience's attention, our findings show that AH exaggerates the narratives while commodifying the information. This is because exaggerating the story will increase its quality (Cole & Beike, 2019). Exaggerating the narratives, in this context, can be seen as an effort by AH to add "extra flavor" to his content to make it more interesting and appealing. And according to Raun (2018) this action is completely driven by an economic motive.

From the MCDA framework, we can holistically see how AH exaggerates the process of commodification through various aspects: content title, thumbnail, photography composition, and conversation. The aspects, such as content title, thumbnail, and tag, are important to observe, since this metadata is crucial for content creators in promoting their video's popularity (Hoiles et al., 2016). In the titles and thumbnails, he exploited that with specific phrases such as 'full marble', '100 billion rupiahs (of price) apartment', 'highest-paid actress', 'very spacious', and 'success at the age of 20' as a clickbait spell. The spell is also enhanced by supporting images representing the properties' luxury. As for the tags, AH only uses the *#GrebekRumah* tag. It seems that tag is not the feature AH optimizes more. Thus, he tends to focus more on other features.

Figure 1: AH feat Nikitta Willy's content thumbnail (AH, 2022)

Figure 1 is the thumbnail of his content with Nikita Willy. The thumbnail contains a sensational headline stating that the property was worth 100 billion rupiah. However, in the whole content, the authors couldn't find statements validating the claim(see AH, 2022). This means the claim is still questionable.

212

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

In that thumbnail, there is also a statement claiming that Nikita Willy is the highest-paid soap opera actress. The claim can't be classified as a hoax since the media crowned Nikita Willy as 'The Queen of Indonesian Soap Opera' and listed her as one of the highest-paid actresses (Global Radio, 2024; Pratama, 2020). However, no credible source related to the exact amount of her rate. Furthermore, Nikita Willy herself doesn't know how much she gets paid for every work she is involved in (Lova & Pangeran, 2021).

This means the claim can't be verified as 100 percent valid. Moreover, the entire video does not, at any point, talk about that claim. Therefore, AH's claim on the thumbnail can be seen as an exaggeration. That is just extra flavor to commodify the content through the title and thumbnail. As Hoiles et al. (2016) said, this is important to attract more viewers. Moreover, Mosco (2009) argued that images and symbols play an important role in shaping consciousness. In sum, this exaggerated narrative can captivate the audience.

The same pattern was implied in his collaboration with Fuji (see AH, 2023). In the thumbnail, he wrote "20 Billion Rupiah in Total?! (Total 20 Milyar?!)", which is not a statement, but a question. This means the validity of the information is still uncertain. However, the creator still uses that uncertainty to exaggerate the narration just to make the content more appealing, since AH, as a YouTuber, is required to deliver the content attractively (Nurhasanah et al., 2022). Whether the information is valid or not. The main concern is to ensure the content can be marketed (Mosco, 2009; Raun, 2018).

Figure 2: AH feat Cinta Laura's content thumbnail (AH, 2023a)

In his content with Cinta Laura, Atta made a thumbnail that contains two separate images: the image of one of the rooms at Cinta Laura's property, and the image of a big house. The big house image could be perceived as the exterior of her property, but in the whole content, we couldn't find a scene that displayed the exact building. Unlike another image in the thumbnail, that could be validated in one of the scenes of the content. According to that, we can assume this as another example of exaggerated practice to enhance his narration about the collaborator's property. At some level, we can also conclude that the image is a tool to exaggerate commodified information.

As we mentioned before, images and symbols have a significant effect on content commodification (Mosco, 2009). Regarding that, we should address the photography composition as one of the ways the content creator commodifies and might exaggerate the information. From the photography composition, the exaggerated

213

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

narratives practice could be seen in how the camera angle was taken and the images were edited. The camera angle is important in creating impressions and perceptions (Halim & Yulius, 2020; Negara et al., 2023). The camera angle also determines the photography composition, while photography composition determines the meanings (Bielak, 2018). This means that meanings in photography are constructed (Severn, 2021). In sum, there is a strong motive behind the photography composition.

In every photography composition of *Grebek Rumah*'s content, AH has the motive to show the extraordinary parts of the collaborator's property. That includes extraordinary space, extraordinary price, extraordinary material, super luxurious interior and exterior design, and even a super luxurious collection of vehicles (see AH, 2022; AH, 2023c; AH, 2023b; AH, 2023a). The motive is clear: to transform that information into content that he could sell to the audience. Concerning this, Mosco (2009) implies that interpersonal life can be a commodity. In this case, AH utilizes the interpersonal life (his relations) with the collaborators to exploit their personal information as content, particularly the information related to their property and their wealth that is embedded there.

Figure 3: A scene from AH feat Raffi Ahmad's content that showcases a room full of marble material (AH, 2023a, at 9:19-9:23)

For example, in his content collaboration with Raffi Ahmad, he showcases a room full of marble, as displayed in figure 3. There is also a part where he showcases the collection of Raffi Ahmad's luxury vehicles, see AH (2023a) at 14:33-19:03. The photography composition will follow that motive as Severn (2021) states that the meaning in photography is constructed. The same patterns are also applied in other content. In his content with Nikita Willy and Fuji, he exposes the luxury of the property's interior design (see AH, 2022; AH, 2023c). While in his content collaboration with Cinta Laura (see AH, 2023b), he exposes the super spacious area of the property.

214

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

Figure 4: The area of Cinta Laura's property from drone level angle (AH, 2023b)

The exaggerated narratives through photography composition lie in the visual effect it has. For instance, high-angle photography has the effect of making the object look smaller (Negara et al., 2023). As a result, the surrounding area will look bigger. This means that although the actual size is big, the effect of the photography composition makes it look even bigger. In figure 3, the high-angle photography has the effect of visually exaggerating the size. This is also validated by Nurhasanah et al. (2022) that argued editing is one of the efforts by YouTubers to gain attractiveness of their content.

Eliteness and superlativeness are some factors that can make media content worthy (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). AH commodified his collaborators' eliteness as public figures and their superlative properties as the reasons why his content is interesting to the audience. Moreover, The Former Chief of Presidential Staff of the Republic of Indonesia, Moeldoko, as reported by Lestarini (2024), stated that 9,9 million people in Indonesia remain without housing. That is the fact that makes the superlative effect related to the luxuries embedded in the properties even bigger. Because only a few people have it due to its high exclusivity. In terms of content commodification, it makes the content economically more marketable to the audience. Although this kind of content can create problems such as social jealousy (Yuniar, 2023). However, the creator seems careless about this potential social problem since their main concern is capital interest (Mosco, 2009).

AH also wrapped those intended photography compositions for his video content with exaggerated conversation. In his content collaboration with Raffi Ahmad (AH, 2023a) AH stated that the price of the stove at Raffi Ahmad's house was 10 billion rupiah. Although Raffi Ahmad never revealed or validated that information.

"So, this is the 10 billion rupiah stove?" asked AH at 4:06-4:07 to exaggerate the narration of luxury.

"No, it's not. He (AH) is just exaggerating," said Nagita Slavina at 4:08-4:11, Raffi Ahmad's wife in front of the camera.

It is interesting to see how his collaborator immediately debunked his exaggerated statement. This indicates that the statement he provided lacks a valid basis,

215

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry:
Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

just to make the content more interesting (Cole & Beike, 2019). Moreover, that is not
the only time he exaggerated the information related to their properties. In another
part, he estimated the price of the parquet in that room was approximately 1 - 1,5 billion
rupiah (AH, 2023a).

> "The parquet cost 1 billion rupiah? 1,5 billion rupiah?" asked at 9:10-
> 9.12.

He then moved to the other part and said, "Guys, check this out! These tiny
things are all marble worth 1,5 billion rupiah!" at 9:18-9:23. Raffi and Nagita just
laughed. Nagita waved to the camera, indicating that she was not confirming the data
provided by AH. In other words, AH was exaggerating it again. And it is confirmed
directly on the content itself.

Our findings show that exaggerated narratives by AH are quite obvious.
Nevertheless, million of audience still watches the content. It is because the show will
continue to be aired (and produced) as long as it is still watched by many (Yuniar, 2023).
Moreover, as long as the audience believes the message, it will not be perceived as
exaggerated (Neureiter et al., 2021), even if it actually is. Meanwhile, the audience can
be more entertained due to the exaggerated narratives (Cole & Beike, 2019). This is the
reason why content such as *Grebek Rumah* is still produced. It is simply because the
market, specifically in the Indonesian context, is good for them. As Mosco (2009) said
that capital plays an important role in controlling and monopoly the market.

b. From Exaggerated Narratives in Content Commodification to Maintaining Capital

Content commodification is strongly related to audience commodification. It is because
the data of the audience that consumes the content subsequently is sold to the
advertisers (Mosco, 2009). In sum, the audience is seen as one of the sources of the
creator's income (Muslikhin et al., 2021).

Our finding shows that in every video, AH always demonstrates audience
commodification practices by selling the audience into his own advertising. Before he
sells it to external parties. It is demonstrating how AH aware to maintain his capital.

216

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

Figure 5: The ads in the opening of *Grebek Rumah* content (AH, 2023)

From the beginning of each video, the audience is shown some businesses affiliated with AH. Figure 5 shows how complex the business lines affiliated with him. The business lines include music production, social media, fashion, and the sports industry. According to Mosco's explanations (2009) in the previous paragraph, AH aims to channel its audience to those business lines.

It shows that AH is prioritizing his interests by promoting his own economic capital, instead of endorsing others in the opening of the videos. Resonating with this, Ørmen & Gregersen (2023) stated that YouTube not only monetizes the attention of the audience but also commodifies all forms of engagement, one of which enables creators to sell digital and physical goods to users or audiences. In other words, the audience is not only a consumer of their content, but also can be converted into a consumer of the creators' businesses.

It can also be seen as AH's effort in widening his income stream. By ensuring he and his business lines can be reached on other platforms. Thus, his social and economic capital will not "leak" everywhere (Rieder et al., 2023).

Besides promoting his business lines in the opening of each content, there is also direct advertising in the ending part of his collaboration content with Raffi Ahmad (AH, 2023a), at 19:05-24:31. The section features his endorsement of Scarlett's body care product.

Figure 6: The ads at the end of *Grebek Rumah* content (AH, 2023a)

Mosco (2009) stated that in the concept of audience commodification, the audience is equivalent to the labor. This is because they work by paying attention to both content and ads. Regarding that explanation, we can see the audience is laborers who make a product called rating, or in YouTube terms, viewers. Just like "ordinary labor", the more they work, the more the company, which is AH, gains money. Meanwhile, the audience tends to not realizing that the creators is gaining profit from them (Ariefaldy et al., 2024).

In this context, the audience of *Grebek Rumah* is working by paying attention to the content and all the promotional messages. Their work will subsequently be recorded as data named viewer numbers. As Mosco (2009) explained, both media (including AH)

217

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

and advertisers utilize this data for their economic benefit. For example, according to the data provided by the authors, the endorsement in Figure 6 is viewed by more than 4 million viewers. This can be categorized as a big offer for the brand since they need to manage their marketing communication activities, particularly the activity through advertising (Fill, 2013). Resonating with that, promotional content can affect the audience's consumptive behavior (Dyanasari et al., 2024). The large number of audiences that AH has is like a big stage for the brand to get a good spotlight. In sum, just like the content, the audience is also a marketable product for the content creator. Maintaining audience engagement is equal to maintaining the economic capital of a YouTuber.

Therefore, a YouTuber is also considered to have social capital (Radu, 2021). AH has a fanatic fan base named A-Team (Putra et al., 2021). Naming the audience is a part of maintaining the social capital that is important for the creator to build a relationship with them (Ariefaldy et al., 2024).

That good relationship with the audience can be converted by the creators into loyalty (Ariefaldy et al., 2024). It means the audience will become a loyal consumer of their content and product. Resonating with this, Raun (2018) argued that in the social media sphere, intimacy has become a currency.

Based on our observation, AH has a good understanding of his audience preferences. It shows that he has quite strong intimacy with them. For instance, prior research shows that AH is loved by his audience because he is perceived as an inspirational and motivational figure (Yudha, 2020; Eriyawati et al., 2020; Sufri et al., 2022).

Objectively, *Grebek Rumah* content is not one hundred percent about exploiting the wealth narratives. In some parts of the content, there are also motivational statements from AH himself and his collaborators. In his content with Fuji (AH, 2023c), AH allows her to give success tips to the viewers.

"Never give up and disregard anyone who hinders your goals. Just pursue your passions, as long as you don't harm others," said Fuji at 21:12-21:29.

The motivational session also appears in his collaboration content with Cinta Laura (AH, 2023b). In that content video, Cinta Laura motivates the youth to never give up, while Atta motivates them to be good at investing. AH said, "We should invest in other areas. If you are an actor, try investing in properties or camera equipment rental. So when you are not in front of the camera, you can still earn income,". However, in his content with Nikita Willy (AH, 2022), instead of giving the motivation related to success tips, it gives the motivation related to parenting tips to the audience.

It shows that AH listens to what his audience wants from him. Some prior research we provided above shows that AH has a loyal target audience, despite some critiques toward him (Fadli, 2023; Wardhani, 2021; Pramesti, 2019). By focusing on his loyal audience, he aims to manage good engagement with them. Regarding this, Medina

218

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry:
Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

et al. (2023) argued that nowadays, media users are no longer passive in consuming media content since they also rate, share, and also viral-spread it. This activity of media users indicates that positive engagement only exists if the content is loved by the audience.

Millions of likes shown in Table 1 indicate that AH has good engagement with his audience. This is aligned with the finding from Maulana et al. (2020) which stated that the more satisfied the audience is with the content, the more loyal they are. The more loyal they are, the easier for the content creator to advertise something. That is why Wahzudin et al. (2023) argued that rating, or viewer in this context, is everything for the content creator. The viewer's detailed information recorded by the digital system subsequently will be sold to the advertiser (Mosco, 2009). This study is not providing how much the exact money AH earns from advertising, since it is out of the study's scope. Nevertheless, his monthly YouTube income is estimated to reach hundreds of millions to billions of rupiah (Yudha, 2020), while his annual YouTube income is estimated to reach more than 200 billion rupiah (Nurhaliza, 2024). Those numbers are separate from other earnings related to his content, particularly endorsements.

Regarding that, our analysis has shown that this power can't be separated from AH's performance in maintaining his both social and economic capital. Meanwhile, those capital can be derived from the audience who are attracted to his content. And in producing the content, he commodifies the information and delivers it with exaggerated narratives.

c. Exaggerated Narratives in Content Commodification and Its Impact on The Creator's Reputation

Through his content, AH seeks to establish an inspiring digital persona. Digital persona is the extension of individual identity in the digital sphere (Olivero et al., 2020), including on YouTube. Thus, creators tend to build it positively.

His fandom caught that digital persona perfectly, by perceiving AH as an inspirational figure (Yudha, 2020; Eriyawati et al., 2020; Sufri et al., 2022). This practically formed a positive public image for AH, since every action aims to create a specific public image (Wæraas, 2018). As well as this contributes to his social capital accumulation (Radu, 2021). Building on our prior discussion, we argued that this kind of capital is maintained well by AH.

Nevertheless, mediated persona, including performed persona on YouTube, operates under the modulation of commercial interest (Moore et al., 2017). YouTubers construct their online persona by adapting to several factors, including audience preferences, monetization policies, and the YouTube algorithm (Radu, 2021). Based on that explanation, we can see and conclude that AH's digital persona is built and driven by economic motives.

As previously discussed, we have shown how AH performs those economic motives through content commodification with exaggerated narratives in the first stage. However, this action is also being criticized and protested. Tompi stated that AH has

219

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

provided invalid information regarding his house, which was previously the subject of AH's content (Metro TV, 2024). It shows that AH's exaggerated narrative has crossed the line. In this case, it becomes unethical.

Online activities would reshape how individuals produce their digital identity (Moore et al., 2017), including their digital persona. On the other hand, a digital persona could be affecting the public image and reputation. And reputation is important on social networks (Olivero et al., 2020), especially for a big-name creator such as AH. Thus, AH's unethical practice, as we mentioned before, can affect his image. Whereas a negative public image has a strong relation to influencing the overall figure's reputation (Kriyantono, 2012; Maryani et al., 2020). Unfortunately, in this case, that unethical practice would be damaging AH's reputation.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights YouTube as a site where the political economy of communication unfolds, with content creators engaging in commodification practices driven by capital interests. In the case of AH, exaggerated narratives serve as a deliberate strategy to enhance entertainment value, attract audiences, and sustain capital through both external advertising and self-promotion. While such narratives function as effective tools for audience commodification, they also pose reputational risks when perceived as unethical.

Practically, exaggerated narratives may be employed by creators if kept within ethical boundaries. From the audience's perspective, resisting inappropriate content through non-consumption remains the most effective countermeasure, since production is sustained by market demand. Theoretically, this study contributes by positioning exaggerated narratives as a critical dimension in content commodification research, shifting focus from what is commodified to how it is communicated. Future research can extend this analysis to emerging platforms such as TikTok, where similar practices are rapidly evolving.

BIODATA

Azzumar Adhitia Santika is a lecturer at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. His interests include media and cultural studies, phenomenology, and political public relations.

Yasmin Alvina is a lecturer at the LSPR Institute of Communication and Business. Her professional interest lies in digital content communication, comedy, and theater. She has also worked as a journalist for a major national television network.

220

Azzumar Adhitia Santika | Commodification Through Exaggerated Narratives in Indonesian YouTube Industry: Capital Maintenance & Reputation.

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221

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222

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223

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