

Abstract

This thesis evaluates the potential viability of the subscription-based creator economy by analysing three subscription creator platforms, Substack, Nebula and Patreon. Drawing on Bernard Stiegler's work in the sphere of digital technologies, this study argues that the alternative mode of information dissemination demonstrated by these platforms presents a more equal distribution of power between the players in the creator economy and a healthier, more thoughtful content creation and consumption, in contrast to the algorithmic distribution of information of the traditional advertiser-driven social media networks. The research focuses on delineating the circumstances which led to the political and spiritual malaise of modern online generations described by Stiegler and examines how subscription-based platforms attempt to combat the harmful effects of major social networks. The creator economy is an integral part of almost every online interaction, therefore evaluating alternative economic models can be the key to improving the declining quality of the online user experience. The use-case analysis will involve assessing the business model, as well as the impact on the relationship between the creator, consumer and the IT platform, employing the digital labour theory proposed by Christian Fuchs.

Findings indicate that subscription creator platforms hold the potential to restore the balance of power between the creator, consumer and the IT company. By allowing online creators to monetize their content through a direct relationship with their audience, this model gives the creator control over their content, its distribution and dissemination practices. For the consumer, a conscious monetary effort returns agency over content consumption absent from algorithmically driven networks. While the model has obvious drawbacks, it presents a better, more equal and more thoughtful alternative to traditional social media.

Keywords: digital capitalism, creator economy, user-generated content, surveillance capitalism, spectacle society, egalitarianism, digital labour