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Gift or Rent? How TikTok Reconfigures Value, Labor and Precarity for African Entrepreneur Creators

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of Africa's creator economy has positioned TikTok's virtual gifting system as a critical revenue stream for thousands of entrepreneur-creators, yet scholarly understanding of how these platform-mediated transactions reconfigure value, labor, and precarity in African contexts remains largely undocumented. This study asks whether TikTok LIVE gifting functions as a hybrid value form—simultaneously gift-like at the level of relational experience and rent-like at the level of platform architecture—and how this hybridity relates to creators' perceived extraction and experienced precarity. Employing a convergent mixed-methods design with quantitative surveys (n=384) and semi-structured interviews (n=20) among TikTok entrepreneur-creators in Nigeria and Kenya, the study tests three hypotheses linking perceived gift-commodity hybridity (PGCH), aspirational labor orientation (ALO), income dependence, and creator precarity (CP). Findings reveal that PGCH negatively predicts perceived platform rent extraction (β=-.178), income dependence rather than total income predicts precarity across all three sub-dimensions (β=.196), and ALO positively predicts PGCH (β=.175), with the PGCH→CP effect running almost entirely through rent perception (94% mediated). Critically, qualitative data reveal that creators actively manage gift and commodity meanings simultaneously, contradicting a misrecognition in literature. The study contributes a synthesized "hybrid value form" concept extending platform-gifting scholarship to African economic infrastructures which has excluded it for years, identifies embodied precarity as an unmeasured dimension, and provides evidence that platform power is secured through withholding disclosure rather than deceiving creators. Implications for platform governance, creator advocacy, and the theorization of digital value are discussed.

Introduction

A viewer in Lagos taps a virtual rose onto a TikTok LIVE stream. A few taps later that rose is a fraction of a naira in the creator's mobile-money wallet, having passed through a coin price TikTok sets, a diamond rate TikTok sets, a dollar conversion, a local-currency conversion, and a banking agent who knows the recipient by name. Both parties call the transfer a gift yet neither can say what share of it the platform kept.

That distance between what the transfer is called and what can be known about it now carries real economic weight. TikTok's user base stands at approximately 37.4 million in Nigeria and 15.1 million in Kenya, both among its fastest-growing Sub-Saharan African markets (DataReportal, 2024; Ameh & Emmanuel, 2025), while Nigeria's digital content sector has grown at over 10% annually (GSMA, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Unlike legacy platforms monetised through advertising, TikTok has engineered live interaction itself into a primary revenue stream: viewers purchase coins, send animated gifts, and creators convert what remains into cash (Lin, 2021; Cristea, 2024). The transaction is therefore described in the vocabulary of the gift while it takes the platform structure as rent, that is, a kind of income accruing to control of a chokepoint rather than to production of the thing transacted (Srnicek, 2017; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). TikTok produces neither the performance that moves a viewer to send the rose nor the sentiment

that makes it meaningful. What it owns is the platform of performance, conversion pipeline, the exchange rates between its own units, the payout threshold, and the discretion to interrupt any of them.

Research on platform gifting has approached this from two directions, and the division tracks method rather than ideology. Studies working from givers' own accounts of their motives (Kollock, 1999; Wohn et al., 2018) find genuine, if partial, continuity with older gift logics such as parasocial attachment, anticipated reciprocity, a sense of community. Studies working from platform design and monetisation architecture (Terranova, 2000; Belk, 2014; John, 2017; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019) find that whatever sentiment exists is harvested by a system that profits regardless of the giver's sincerity. A third body of work, arriving independently from anthropology, sociology, marketing and internet studies (Appadurai, 1986; Belk, 2014; Barbrook, 1998; Zelizer, 2005), converges on the conclusion that treating any exchange as purely gift or purely commodity is analytically weaker than treating it as a shifting position between the two.

The convergence is substantial, and it is precisely what makes two omissions consequential. First, the two directions describe different levels of the same phenomenon, which are: felt motivation and engineered architecture. Yet no study has measured both levels in a single case with equal authority, leaving unanswered whether gift-framing blindfold creators' recognition of extraction or sharpens it. Second, empirical literature on this subject matter are largely Western studies built on Twitch, organised around US and European streamers, and on Douyin and Kuaishou, organised around China's regulatory and payments environment. A creator in Lagos or Nairobi additionally navigates currency volatility, thin banking-agent networks, and mobile-money cash-out embedded in local rather than platform-controlled trust (Kusimba, 2021). The conversion chain, where a substantial and undisclosed share of value is lost, has not been theorised together with gifting itself. The African case is thus a stress test of hybrid-value theorising rather than an illustration of it. A gap empirical literature is yet to cover. What rests on the answer is a specific policy instrument. Proposals to require platforms to disclose the effective creator share, after coin pricing, diamond conversion and currency conversion, not before, assume that gift-framing is just a misunderstanding that more information would dissolve. This position puts the gift-framing as relational work that creators perform knowingly and disclosure would change what they know without changing how they frame. Following this line of argument implies that regulators would be reaching for the wrong remedy.

The purpose of this study is therefore to cover a literature gap by determining whether TikTok LIVE gifting functions as a hybrid value form for African entrepreneur-creators, and how that hybridity relates to perceived extraction and experienced precarity. Employing a convergent mixed-methods design with a survey of 384 creators and semi-structured interviews with 20 in Nigeria and Kenya, it tests whether perceived gift–commodity hybridity is associated with lower perceived platform rent extraction, whether dependence on gifting income rather than total income predicts precarity, and whether aspirational labour orientation sustains the gift frame.

Literature Review

Gift Exchange, Reciprocity, and Hybrid Value Forms on Platforms

What exactly is a gift? If two people exchange gifts, do they have similar notion about its meaning (gift or barter)? These questions lay the foundation for literature understanding into this phenomenon of enquiry. Academic interest in gift exchange begins not from curiosity about generosity but from a polemical target. That is, classical and neoclassical economic models that treated exchange as reducible to rational, self-interested, utility-maximizing barter. To critically unpack the foregoing, Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) supplied the first sustained ethnographic rebuttal. His account of the Kula ring, the ceremonial, island-spanning circulation of shell armbands (*mwali*) and necklaces (*soulava*) among Trobriand Islanders, documented an exchange system that was economically almost pointless (the shells had negligible use value) yet socially indispensable, since Kula partnerships secured trade access, political alliance, and status across otherwise disconnected island communities. Malinowski's contribution was as much methodological as substantive: he insisted that only sustained participant-observation, not the "armchair" comparative method of earlier anthropology, could reveal how such a system actually worked from the inside. Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1990 [1925]) generalized Malinowski's insight into a theory. Drawing comparatively on Polynesian, Melanesian, and Pacific Northwest Coast material, Mauss argued that gift exchange in "archaic" societies is never a free, disinterested act but a "total social phenomenon" bound by a threefold obligation: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. Refusing any of the three is not merely rude but socially and, in Mauss's Maori-derived account, spiritually dangerous: the *hau*, or spirit of the gift, is said to compel its own return to the giver. Later scholarship has revisited how much interpretive weight that single Maori concept can bear, and whether Mauss's framework in fact derives more from Roman legal categories of obligation than from Indigenous Pacific cosmology, a debate that matters for this review because it is an early instance of a recurring pattern: a culturally specific vocabulary for exchange (here, "spirit," later "sharing," "gifting,"

"support") being generalized into a supposedly universal analytic category. Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969 [1949]) extended Mauss structurally, arguing that the exchange principle Mauss identified in gift-giving also organizes marriage systems: kin groups exchange spouses under rules formally analogous to the exchange of valuables, making reciprocity a foundational, near-universal structuring logic of society rather than a quaint feature of a few Pacific economies.

Literature further later gained some refinement, however, it complicated reciprocity. Examples are Marshall Sahlins's *Stone Age Economics* (1972) is the field's most consequential refinement. Rather than treating reciprocity as a single phenomenon, Sahlins proposed a continuum running from generalized reciprocity (giving without calculation of return or timing, typical of close kin, what Sahlins, following Mauss, associated with something like communism at the household scale) through balanced reciprocity (a direct, more or less equivalent, socially expected exchange) to negative reciprocity (an attempt to get something for as little as possible in return, up to and including haggling or theft), with the position on this continuum tracking social distance between the parties. This continuum is one of the two or three most portable concepts this review draws on our study: it lets us classify a single platform transaction not as "gift" or "not-gift" in binary terms, but as occupying a point on a spectrum that can shift , for instance, from something closer to generalized reciprocity (a fan spontaneously supporting a creator they feel connected to) toward balanced or even negative reciprocity (a "battle" of competing donations staged for status, or a platform's commission structure quietly extracting value from both sides).

To anchor the paper robustly, apart from gift, five more terms need to be fixed, since the rest of the review and the study depends on using them precisely rather than interchangeably: reciprocity (Sahlins's continuum, above); relational work (Zelizer's term, below, for the ongoing effort people expend matching a type of tie to a type of payment); earmarking (Zelizer's term for money being made socially "special" — Christmas money, tip money, blood money, rather than treated as a single homogeneous quantity); platformization (Nieborg & Poell's term for how platform infrastructures and business models penetrate and reorganize an entire sector of cultural production, not just individual transactions within it); and hybrid value form, this study's own organizing term, used here to mean a transfer that is simultaneously coded and experienced as a gift (voluntary, relational, affectively meaningful) and as a commodity or wage payment (quantified, platform-mediated, extractable as revenue).

Critically synthesis of literature complexity is then dissolved into these six arms. Read individually, the six threads in literature looks like six separate directions that happens to share a family resemblance. Read together, three things become visible that no single thread states on its own. First, on the central

theoretical debate (gift/commodity binary versus continuum), the *weight of the evidence favors continuum and hybrid-form thinking over any strong binary*, and this is true across schools that never cite one another: Appadurai and Kopytoff's biographical account of commoditization, Zelizer's relational work and earmarking, Belk's pseudo-sharing, and Barbrook's explicit "symbiosis" of gift and commodity relations are four independently derived arguments, from anthropology, sociology, marketing, and internet studies respectively, converging on the same conclusion, that treating any given exchange as *purely* gift or *purely* commodity is analytically weaker than treating it as occupying a shifting position that can be pulled toward one pole or the other by design, framing, and context. This convergence is what licenses this thesis's central "hybrid value form" vocabulary: it is not a novel coinage floating free of theory, but a name for a pattern the literature has been independently rediscovering for forty years.

Second, on whether platform-mediated gifting is better read as genuine reciprocity or as ideologically laundered extraction, the literature is genuinely split, and the split tracks methodology as much as ideology. Studies working from viewers' or givers' own accounts of their motives (Kollock, 1999; Wohn et al., 2018) tend to find real, if partial, continuity with older gift logics, parasocial attachment, anticipated reciprocity, a sense of community. Studies working from platform design, monetization architecture, or business documents (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Terranova, 2000; Belk, 2014; John, 2017) tend to find that whatever authentic sentiment exists is being actively harvested by a designed system that profits regardless of the giver's sincerity. These are not, on inspection, contradictory findings about the same object; they are findings about two different levels of the same phenomenon — individual motivation and platform architecture — that happen to coexist. A giver's felt generosity and a platform's engineered extraction of that generosity are not mutually exclusive, and the thesis's title, tracing an arc "from gifts to rent," is precisely a claim about how a system can be genuinely gift-like at the level of individual motivation while becoming increasingly rent-like at the level of aggregate platform architecture — a distinction the literature supports but has not, to date, stated in exactly these terms for any single case.

Third, working out how the six threads *actually relate to one another*, rather than merely sit adjacent, yields at least one connection none of the individual sources draws explicitly, which this review offers as its own contribution rather than a restatement of an existing synthesis. Zelizer's "relational work" (people actively matching a medium of exchange to a type of relationship, disguising or managing the tension between intimacy and money) and Maurer, Nelms, and Rea's "bridges to cash" (human agents actively re-embedding an impersonal payment rail in relationships of local trust) and TikTok's own coin-to-diamond-

to-cash conversion pipeline are, this review argues, three layers of the *same underlying process* — the ongoing social labor of keeping a transfer of value morally legible as something other than a bare cash payment, operating at three different technological and institutional scales: interpersonal (Zelizer), infrastructural-human (Maurer et al.), and platform-algorithmic (TikTok's UX design, which deliberately multiplies the number of steps and symbolic conversions between "sending a gift" and "the platform being paid," echoing Bourdieu's much older observation, in a wholly different context, that gift exchange requires a temporal or symbolic gap to disguise its own reciprocal, interested logic). No single source in this review draws that three-level connection explicitly; making it is this review's own contribution to synthesizing the field, and it is the connection the thesis's empirical chapters can now test directly against African creators' accounts of what "gifting" feels like versus what it structurally is.

Literature Gap and Study Contribution

There remains an apparent obscurity in empirical literature on TikTok LIVE gifting specifically among African creators through the combined lens of classical reciprocity theory, relational economic sociology's hybrid-value framework, and critical platform political economy. This is not a trivial or merely bureaucratic gap: it means that the single most theoretically sophisticated existing account of how "gifts" and "commodities" blend (Zelizer, Appadurai, Belk) has never been tested against a case where the *additional* complicating factors this review's Africanist sources establish, thin banking-agent networks, currency volatility, a development-narrative political economy actively promoting "digital entrepreneurship" to young Africans, and a platform whose own gifting architecture was inherited wholesale from a Chinese sibling platform built for an entirely different regulatory and payments environment — are all simultaneously in play. Each of those factors, the reviewed literature gives strong reason to expect, would materially change how a gift/commodity hybrid actually operates in practice, not merely how it should be theorized in the abstract. More consequential, literature has failed to answer the question of how does African entrepreneur creators navigate, explain, and experience gifting as either exploitative commodity settings, or extractive gift. Therefore, to fill these research gaps, we measure, not simply whether hybrid value forms exist on TikTok, but how they *function*: whether gift-framing (PGCH) masks or heightens creators' conscious recognition of platform extraction (PPRE); how much of creators' continued platform engagement is sustained by hope rather than current return (ALO); and how all three, together with creators' economic dependence on gifting income, relate to the real precarity (CP) they experience. The study is ultimately measuring where, along a creator's income trajectory, the balance tips from gift toward rent as experienced through their activities on TikTok live.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in three intersecting theoretical traditions—Maussian gift theory, digital labor studies, and the critical political economy of platforms—enabling a multidimensional analysis of TikTok's virtual gifting system as a site where cultural logics of reciprocity converge with platform-managed value extraction, generating precarious entrepreneurial labor. Maussian gift theory (Mauss, 1925/1990) offers a foundational lens for understanding gifting as a "total social fact" embedded in obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate. While these principles remain culturally salient across many African societies, TikTok's system mediates them through algorithmic visibility and monetized conversions, raising questions about whether platform-mediated gifting retains inalienable, socially binding qualities or has become commodified. An exploration of these theoretical dimensions in this study position it strongly as well as give it credence. Digital labor studies (Scholz, 2013; Fuchs, 2014; Cunningham & Craig, 2019) reframe content creation and audience engagement as immaterial and affective labor that generates platform value. Within this framework, virtual gifting constitutes a mechanism of value extraction wherein creators' emotional labor, entertaining, building intimacy, performing gratitude—is directly monetized under precarious conditions marked by income instability and algorithmic dependency. The critical political economy of platforms (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Zuboff, 2019) supplies the macro-structural dimension, conceptualizing platforms as infrastructural intermediaries exercising unilateral power over rule-setting, data capture, and market outcomes. This perspective directs attention to TikTok's policy asymmetries—payout thresholds, conversion fees, visibility algorithms—that advantage the platform while exposing creators to risk, contextualized within global inequalities where peripheral economies face additional infrastructural constraints. Synthesizing these traditions, the study proposes the *hybrid value form* as an integrative concept capturing the entanglement of gift and commodity logics under platform capitalism. Unlike binary accounts, this framework conceptualizes gifting as a space where social obligations are enrolled into revenue flows, producing value that is simultaneously relational and extractive, enabling analysis of how African entrepreneur creators navigate, resist, and reproduce these dual logics in everyday practice (see Figure 1).

Table 1: Conceptual Clarification of Constructs

One central construct, three related ones it's measured against.

Construct	Definition	Theoretical Grounding
Perceived Gift–Commodity Hybridity (PGCH)— *central construct*	The degree to which a creator experiences platform-mediated monetary transfers (coins, diamonds, LIVE gifts) as simultaneously relational/affective (gift-like) and calculative/transactional (commodity-like), rather than as unambiguously one or the other	Zelizer (1994, 2005) — relational work, earmarking; Appadurai (1986) — commodity situations; Belk (2014) — pseudo-sharing
Perceived Platform Rent Extraction (PPRE)	The degree to which a creator perceives the platform — rather than the creator or the giving fan — as the principal economic beneficiary of gifting transactions	Srnicek (2017) — platform capitalism; Nieborg & Poell (2018) — contingent commodity; Couldry & Mejias (2019) — data colonialism
Aspirational Labor Orientation (ALO)	The extent to which a creator sustains effortful, often under-compensated content and relationship-building work on the expectation of future reward rather than immediate return	Duffy (2017) — aspirational labor; Duffy & Wissinger (2017) — mythologies of creative work
Creator Precarity (CP)	Multidimensional insecurity across three sub-dimensions: economic (income instability), algorithmic (vulnerability to opaque platform visibility/monetization decisions), and social (dependence on the durability of the fan relationship)	Duffy, Pinch, Sannon & Sawey (2021) — nested precarities; van Doorn (2017) — platform labor

Table 1 above contains the constructs this study aim to measure in providing result and analysis to the study.

Research Questions

RQ1. To what extent do African entrepreneur-creators on TikTok perceive platform-mediated gifting transactions as a hybrid gift–commodity value form, rather than as an unambiguous gift or an unambiguous commercial payment? **RQ2.** How do creators' perceived gift–commodity hybridity, aspirational labor orientation, and economic dependence on platform gifting relate to their perceived platform rent extraction and their experienced precarity? (see table 1 for constructs)

Hypotheses

H1 (Hybridity masks extraction). Perceived Gift–Commodity Hybridity (PGCH) will be negatively associated with Perceived Platform Rent Extraction (PPRE), net of income dependence.

H2 (Dependence breeds precarity). Economic dependence on platform gifting will be positively associated with Creator Precarity CP (all three sub-dimensions), controlling for total income.

H3 (Aspiration sustains the gift frame). Aspirational Labor Orientation (ALO) will be positively associated with PGCH.

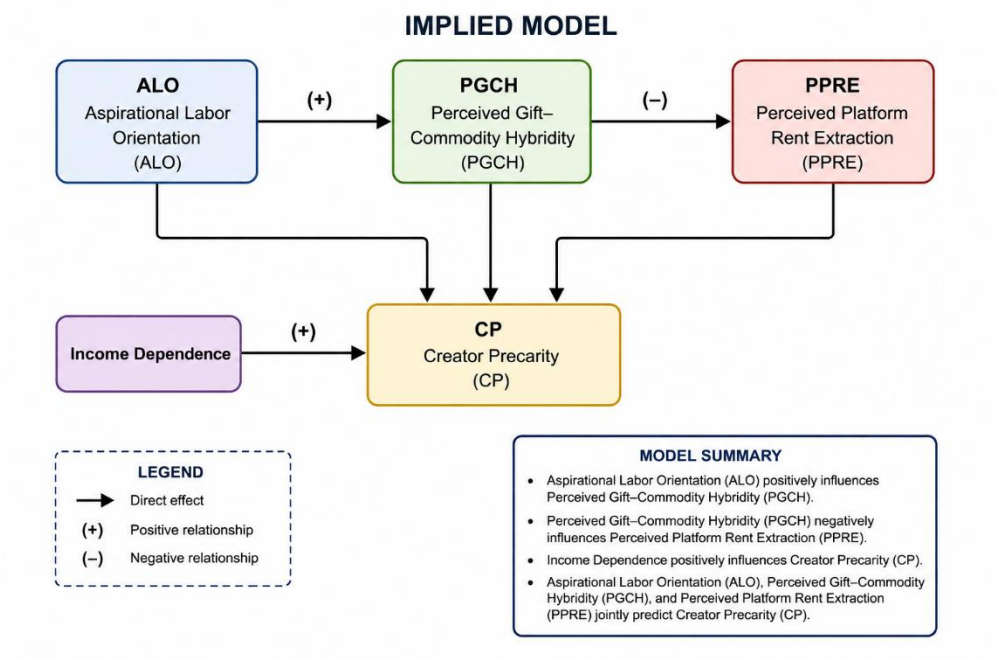


Figure 1: Implied Model designed by authors

Research Methodology

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018): a quantitative survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews, collected in the same period, analysed independently, and merged at interpretation. The two strands were assigned equal weight, and the justification is specific rather than conventional. A quant-dominant design would have been appropriate if the qualitative strand's role were to illustrate or contextualise established relationships; a qual-dominant design would have been appropriate if the constructs were unstable and the survey exploratory. Neither describes this study. The central theoretical claim, that a transaction can be gift-like at the level of felt experience while being rent-like at the level of architecture — is a claim that *two levels disagree*. Testing it requires each level to be measured on its own terms with equal authority, so that a disagreement between them counts as a finding rather than as measurement error in the subordinate strand. Equal weighting is therefore entailed by the theoretical claim, not chosen for balance. The design's payoff is visible in analysis section of this study where the qualitative strand contributes more to the quantitative one by adding more information to its interpretation.

The population comprised entrepreneur-creators on TikTok resident in Nigeria and Kenya who (a) were 18 or older, (b) actively created and posted content on TikTok, (c) had gone LIVE and received virtual gifts from viewers, and (d) identified, fully or in part, as entrepreneurs using the platform to generate income.

At the time of data collection, TikTok's user base was reported at approximately 37.4 million in Nigeria (about 15.8% of the national population) and approximately 15.1 million in Kenya, with both countries among the platform's fastest-growing Sub-Saharan African markets (DataReportal, 2024). No official register existed of the specific sub-population targeted, creators who both self-identified as entrepreneurs and monetised through LIVE gifting. For sampling purposes this sub-population was treated as unknown/infinite, a standard classification where no sampling frame exists. The quantitative strand ran over 24 consecutive weeks, and interviews were conducted within the same window. Specifying the window matters more here than in most studies, because TikTok's monetisation rules, LIVE eligibility thresholds, and regional payout arrangements change on a timescale of months, and any finding about creators' perceptions of platform economics is bounded by the policy regime in force. Readers should treat the findings as describing the regime in operation during the collection window rather than a stable feature of the platform (January-June, 2025).

Because no sampling frame existed, probability sampling was not feasible. Purposive and snowball sampling (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016) were used for both strands. Purposive sampling identified creators visibly meeting the inclusion criteria, regular LIVE sessions, visible gifting activity, self-description as a content-based entrepreneur, located through targeted hashtag searches and creator-focused community groups on TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook. Snowball sampling extended reach through referrals (note: all creators have a TikTok account and fulfils all the eligibility requirement of the study earlier stated.) For the qualitative strand, purposive sampling additionally incorporated maximum-variation logic across follower-count tiers, gender, content category, and reliance on gifting income.

Given the unknown population size, the sample size for the quantitative strand was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for infinite populations:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where Z = 1.96 (95% confidence level), p = 0.5 (maximum variability, used in the absence of a prior estimate), q = 1 − p = 0.5, and e = 0.05 (5% margin of error).

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16 \approx 384$$

A minimum sample of 384 respondents was therefore adopted for the quantitative strand. To allow for incomplete or invalid responses, the questionnaire was distributed to approximately 460 prospective respondents, anticipating a retention of at least 384 valid, usable cases. This figure also comfortably cleared the general guideline that structural equation modeling with four latent constructs requires a minimum of roughly 200 cases (see table 2). For the qualitative strand, sample size followed the principle of data saturation rather than a fixed formula. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), in a study notably also conducted in West Africa, found that thematic saturation in homogeneous, purposively sampled populations was typically reached within 12 interviews, with core thematic elements already present by the sixth. On this basis, a target of 20 interview participants was set. The target of 20 was therefore set

above the Guest et al. benchmark rather than justified by it, and saturation is reported in the result as an observed property of this dataset.

Table 2: Sample size allocation

Strand	Nigeria	Kenya	Total
Quantitative (survey)	230 distributed	230 distributed	460 distributed / 384 valid (target)
Qualitative (interview)	10	10	20

Table 2 above contains the distribution of qualitative and quantitative sample size for the study.

Two constraints follow from the design and are stated here rather than deferred to the limitations section, because they bear on how the result of this study should be read and applied. The snowball sampling initiated from purposively identified contacts propagates through existing creator networks. Creators who are socially connected to visible, hashtag-discoverable, community-group-joining creators are over-represented; isolated creators, creators outside the main-language content spheres, and creators who have exited gifting are under-represented. The consequence is a probable compression of variance on precisely the constructs of interest: a sample of networked creators is likely to share information about commission rates and algorithmic behaviour, which would attenuate the observed spread on PPRE and CPA. However, this study does not claim or conducted for generalization or to prove causation, rather, to indicate association and correlation. As such, the reported associations should therefore be read as conservative rather than inflated on these constructs, but the *descriptive* means in Table 5 should not be generalised to the national creator population. Also, for the country's population, the achieved sample was 57.0% Nigerian and 43.0% Kenyan against a 50/50 distribution target. Neither figure reflects the relative size of the two markets: on the reach estimates (Datareportal, 2024), Nigeria accounts for roughly 71% of the combined TikTok audience across the two countries. The design target was equal allocation to support country comparison, not proportional representation, and these are genuinely different objectives, equal allocation maximises statistical power for detecting between-country differences, while proportional allocation would support pooled estimates generalisable to the combined population. Because the study's primary aims are relational (testing paths among constructs) rather than descriptive-representative, equal allocation was the correct choice. The consequences of the achieved 57/43 split are handled analytically in the results section. Substantive conclusions that do not survive both checks are not claimed.

More so, Nigeria and Kenya are not interchangeable. Kenya's M-PESA infrastructure is among the world's most developed mobile-money systems and is deeply embedded in everyday transacting (Kusimba, 2021); Nigeria's banking-agent network is thinner, more recently expanded, and operates alongside a more volatile currency and a more restrictive regulatory posture toward digital assets. These differences bear directly on the conversion chain. Pooling the two countries without justification would be a substantive error, not merely a statistical one. The study therefore adopts a three-step strategy rather than assuming poolability: 1. **Country as covariate.** Country is entered as a covariate in every substantive regression and structural model. If country carries a significant coefficient, pooled estimates are reported alongside country-specific ones. 2. **Measurement invariance.** Configural, metric, and scalar invariance of the four latent constructs are tested across the two country groups before any pooled latent-variable estimate is interpreted. Pooling is licensed only at metric invariance or better; without it, the constructs do not mean the same thing in the two samples and comparing them is meaningless. 3. **Multi-group path comparison.** The structural paths H1–H3 are estimated separately by country and compared via a constrained-versus-free model χ^2 difference test. The qualitative strand handles the distinction through systematic cross-country comparison of theme weighting rather than through a note that themes appeared in both.

Two instruments were used in the study. (i) A structured, self-administered online questionnaire, the 13-section instrument was developed, comprising consent, screening, demographic and platform/monetization profiling, seven Likert-scaled construct sections (PGCH, PPRE, ALO, and the three CP sub-dimensions), a parasocial-attachment control scale, and two open-ended items. (ii) A semi-structured interview guide, developed to explore the same four constructs in greater depth:

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants gave informed consent before proceeding. For the quantitative strand, the questionnaire was hosted on an online survey platform, and the link was distributed directly to identified creators through TikTok comments and direct messages, and shared within Nigerian and Kenyan creator community groups. Data collection ran over a period of eight weeks, with periodic reminders issued to improve response rate. Responses were screened for completion, attention-check accuracy, and unusually fast completion times before retention for analysis. For the qualitative strand, interviews were scheduled individually with each of the 20 selected participants and conducted via video call or telephone, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted in strictly in English, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

For the validity and reliability of the quantitative instrument, (a) content validity was established through review by a panel of experts in media/communication studies, digital economy research, and survey

methodology, who assessed each item for clarity, relevance, and construct alignment; items were revised accordingly. Face validity was assessed through pilot administration to 30–50 creators outside the main sample. Construct validity was assessed via exploratory factor analysis on pilot data, followed by confirmatory factor analysis on the main dataset. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978); the two adapted subscales (Economic Precarity and Algorithmic Precarity) additionally drew on the established reliability of their source instruments (Vander Elst, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2014; Parent-Rocheleau, Parker, Bujold, & Gaudet, 2024).

(b) Trustworthiness of the qualitative strand. Because interviews are not evaluated by the same criteria as quantitative instruments, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework: *credibility* through member-checking and triangulation with the survey data; *transferability* through thick description and maximum-variation sampling; *dependability* through a consistently applied interview protocol and an audit trail of coding decisions; and *confirmability* through reflexive memoing and independent review of a subsample of transcripts by a second coder.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics and reliability analysis, and structural equation modeling software (R's *lavaan* package) for hypothesis testing. Descriptive statistics addressed RQ1; correlation, regression, and structural equation modeling were used to test H1 (PGCH → PPRE), H2 (Income Dependence → CP), and H3 (ALO → PGCH) simultaneously, answering RQ2 in full. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the analytic narrative. Finally, consistent with the convergent parallel design, quantitative and qualitative findings were merged through a joint display, comparing statistical patterns against qualitative themes to assess the degree of convergence or divergence between what creators reported numerically and what they expressed in their own words.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Key Sample Characteristics

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Country (D1)				
Nigeria	219	57.0	57.0	57.0
Kenya	165	43.0	43.0	100.0
Age (D2)				
18–24	162	42.2	42.2	42.2
25–34	162	42.2	42.2	84.4
35–44	47	12.2	12.2	96.6
45+	13	3.4	3.4	100.0
Entrepreneurial Self-ID (D8)				
Yes, fully	205	53.4	53.4	53.4
Somewhat	157	40.9	40.9	94.3
No	22	5.7	5.7	100.0

The sample on table 3 skewed Nigerian (57.0%) relative to Kenyan (43.0%) respondents, a split close to, but not identical with, the 230/230 target set at the design stage, reflecting the practical reality of snowball recruitment rather than a quota-controlled draw. The age profile was heavily concentrated in the 18–34 bracket (84.4% combined), consistent with independent industry reporting that TikTok's African user base skews young. More substantively, only 5.7% of respondents rejected the entrepreneur label outright, while over half (53.4%) claimed it fully and a further 40.9% claimed it partially. This matters for the thesis's framing: it confirms the "entrepreneur creator" is not a researcher-imposed category but one the large majority of the achieved sample already applies to themselves, which strengthens the face validity of treating Aspirational Labor Orientation (ALO) as a meaningful, self-relevant construct rather than an external imposition. The near-even 18–24/25–34 split also means any age-based subgroup comparisons in later analysis would be reasonably well powered, though the 45+ bracket (n=13) is too thin for separate subgroup inference.

Table 4: Reliability Statistics: Reliability of the Measurement Scales

Scale	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Gift–Commodity Hybridity (PGCH1–5)	5	.833
Perceived Platform Rent Extraction (PPRE)	5	.865
Aspirational Labor Orientation (ALO)	5	.861
Creator Precarity – Economic (CPE, item 2 reverse-scored)	4	.832
Creator Precarity – Algorithmic (CPA)	5	.792
Creator Precarity – Social (CPS)	4	.839
Parasocial Attachment (PSA, control)	5	.844

Table 4 indicates that every scale cleared the conventional $\alpha \geq .70$ threshold (Nunnally, 1978), with algorithmic precarity the weakest (.792) and rent-extraction the strongest (.865). The CP-Algorithmic

scale's comparatively lower alpha is plausible on substantive grounds: unlike the economic and social precarity items, which all describe a single underlying worry (losing income, losing the audience relationship), the algorithmic items span genuinely different experiences — surveillance ("closely tracks"), behavioral pressure ("pressure to post"), and opacity ("do not understand why") — so some attenuation in inter-item consistency is expected rather than a measurement flaw. A separate convergent-validity check comparing the PGCH1–5 composite against the standalone PGCH6 semantic-differential item ("pure gift" to "pure business payment") produced $r = -.382$ ($p < .001$): respondents who scored the composite higher (more gift-leaning language) did place themselves closer to the "pure gift" pole, supporting the composite's validity, though the correlation's moderate size — rather than a strong one — is itself consistent with PGCH being a genuine hybridity construct rather than a simple gift-vs-commodity single continuum: many respondents can score high on "feels like both" while still anchoring toward one pole on a forced single-item scale.

Table 5: RQ1: Descriptive Statistics on Perceived Gift–Commodity Hybridity and Related Constructs

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PGCH	384	1.20	5.00	3.112	.951
PPRE	384	1.00	5.00	3.252	.989
ALO	384	1.00	5.00	3.283	.996
CPE (Economic)	384	1.00	5.00	3.216	.992
CPA (Algorithmic)	384	1.40	5.00	3.381	.878
CPS (Social)	384	1.00	5.00	3.178	1.019
CP (Overall)	384	1.20	5.00	3.258	.746
PSA (Parasocial)	384	1.00	5.00	3.309	.959
Income Dependence (%)	384	0.00	100.00	31.70	28.665
Valid N (listwise)	384				

Table 5 directly answers RQ1. The mean PGCH score (3.11 on a 1–5 scale) sat almost exactly at the scale midpoint, and its standard deviation (.951) was the largest proportionally of any construct relative to its scale range — together indicating that, on average, creators did not resolve their gifting transactions cleanly toward either the "pure gift" or "pure commodity" pole, but genuinely distributed themselves across the hybrid middle range, with real disagreement across the sample about where any given transaction sits. This is itself the empirical signature RQ1 was designed to detect: hybridity, not consensus toward one pole. Algorithmic precarity (CPA, M = 3.38) was the highest-scoring precarity dimension and had the narrowest spread (SD = .878), suggesting algorithm-related anxiety was both more elevated and more uniformly shared across creators than economic or social precarity, which varied more by individual circumstance (SD = .992 and 1.019 respectively). Income Dependence averaged 31.7%, but its very large standard deviation (28.67, nearly as large as the mean itself) signals a bimodal-leaning reality worth flagging for the discussion chapter: this is a sample containing both creators for whom gifting is marginal and creators for whom it is close to their entire livelihood, not a population clustered near the mean.

Table 6: Bivariate Relationships Among Core Constructs (Correlations)

		PGCH	PPRE	ALO	CP	Income Dependence
PGCH	Pearson Correlation	1	−.174**	.133**	−.025	−.083
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.009	.623	.106
PPRE	Pearson Correlation	−.174**	1	−.089	.400**	.329**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.080	.000	.000
ALO	Pearson Correlation	.133**	−.089	1	.257**	.305**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.080		.000	.000
CP	Pearson Correlation	−.025	.400**	.257**	1	.389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.623	.000	.000		.000
Income Dependence	Pearson Correlation	−.083	.329**	.305**	.389**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.106	.000	.000	.000	

*N = 384 for all correlations. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 6 indicates that all three hypothesized relationships were visible at the bivariate level before any controls were applied. PGCH correlated negatively with PPRE (r = −.174, p = .001), consistent with H1's misrecognition logic. ALO correlated positively with PGCH (r = .133, p = .009), consistent with H3. Income Dependence correlated positively with overall CP (r = .389, p < .001), consistent with H2. Notably, PGCH did not correlate significantly with CP directly (r = −.025, p = .623) hybridity perception was tied to rent-recognition specifically, not to felt precarity in general, which is exactly the pattern the theoretical model anticipates: hybridity was hypothesized to act on precarity indirectly, through its effect on rent-perception, not as a direct predictor of precarity itself. Income Dependence and PPRE were also strongly correlated (r = .329, p < .001), raising the possibility that dependence itself partly drives rent-recognition, a relationship that needed disentangling in the regression models below.

Table 7: Linear Regression — DV = Perceived Platform Rent Extraction (PPRE): H1: PGCH → PPRE (controlling for Income Dependence)

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)	Sig.
(Intercept)	3.384	0.174	19.409	<2e-16	***
PGCH	−0.154	0.050	−3.089	.00215	**
Income Dependence	0.011	0.002	6.614	1.27e-10	***

Residual SE = 0.925 on 381 df; Multiple R^2 = .130; Adjusted R^2 = .126; F(2, 381) = 28.53, p < .001

Table 7 indicates that H1 predicted that PGCH would be negatively associated with PPRE net of income dependence, and it was: b = −.154 (p = .002), holding after controlling for the strong positive effect of dependence itself (b = .011, p < .001). Substantively, each one-point increase in gift-framing on the 1–5

PGCH scale was associated with a .154-point decrease in perceived rent extraction — a modest but statistically robust effect, surviving the inclusion of a control variable that itself explained a large share of the model's power. This is the regression-level evidence for Bourdieu's misrecognition thesis and Belk's pseudo-sharing argument operating empirically rather than only theoretically: the more a transaction is experienced in gift language, the less its extractive character is consciously registered, independent of how economically dependent the creator actually is on that transaction. The model's R^2 (.130) indicates PGCH and dependence jointly explained about 13% of variance in rent-perception — a modest but theoretically meaningful share, leaving most of the variance to be explained by factors outside this two-predictor model, which the fuller SEM below addresses.

H2: Income Dependence → Creator Precarity (controlling for Total Income)

Table 8: Linear Regressions — DVs = CP-Economic, CP-Algorithmic, CP-Social, CP-Overall

Predictor	CPE (Economic)	CPA (Algorithmic)	CPS (Social)	CP (Overall)
(Intercept)	2.730*** (.120)	3.049*** (.111)	2.816*** (.128)	2.865*** (.089)
Income Dependence	0.012*** (.002)	0.007*** (.002)	0.009*** (.002)	0.010*** (.001)
Total Income	0.033 (.042)	0.038 (.039)	0.023 (.045)	0.031 (.031)
R^2	.141	.065	.076	.153
Adjusted R^2	.136	.060	.071	.149
F (df = 2, 381)	31.21***	13.31***	15.62***	34.53***

Cell entries are unstandardized B with SE in parentheses.

Table 8 above provides data for H2 which predicted that income dependence would positively predict precarity across all three sub-dimensions, controlling for total income level — and it did, in every model, at $p < .001$, with the economic sub-dimension showing the largest coefficient (b = .0124) and the algorithmic sub-dimension the smallest (b = .0071). Critically, Total Income itself was non-significant in all four models (p ranging from .318 to .609): it is not how much a creator earns overall that predicts precarity, but how concentrated that income is in a single, platform-controlled, algorithmically-mediated channel. This is a theoretically important dissociation — a well-paid creator whose earnings still come mostly through gifting reported precarity levels similar to a poorly-paid one in the same position, while a well-paid but income-diversified creator did not. This directly supports Duffy, Pinch, Sannon and Sawey's (2021) nested-precarity argument that precarity is structural to the dependence relationship itself rather than a simple function of poverty, and gives the thesis's "rent" framing empirical teeth: dependence, not income, is the precarity-generating variable.

Table 9: Linear Regression — DV = Perceived Gift–Commodity Hybridity (PGCH)(H3: ALO → PGCH)

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)	Sig.
(Intercept)	2.696	0.166	16.241	<2e-16	***
ALO	0.127	0.048	2.618	.00919	**

Residual SE = 0.944 on 382 df; Multiple R^2 = .018; Adjusted R^2 = .015; F(1, 382) = 6.855, p = .009

Table 9 presents H3 which predicted that ALO would positively predict PGCH, and the coefficient was positive and significant (b = .127, p = .009): creators most invested in the entrepreneurial "it will pay off

eventually" narrative were somewhat more likely to also frame their gifting income in relational, gift-like terms. However, the effect size here is the weakest of the three hypotheses, and the R^2 (.018) shows aspirational labor orientation alone explains under 2% of variance in hybridity perception. This is a real but modest confirmation rather than a strong one, and it matters for how the finding should be written up: ALO is one contributor to gift-framing among several, not its dominant driver. This is consistent with Duffy's (2017) own qualitative account, which never claimed aspirational labor was the sole engine of gift-like meaning-making — other forces (parasocial attachment, cultural norms around gift-giving, or platform design itself) likely carry more of that explanatory weight, a possibility the full structural model below is better positioned to evaluate.

RQ2: Full Structural Model: Table 10: SEM Structural Paths (lavaan-Style Output)

Path	Estimate (B)	Std. Error	z-value	P(>|z|)	Std. Estimate (β)	Sig.
PGCH ← ALO *(H3)*	0.179	0.061	2.912	.004	.175	**
PPRE ← PGCH *(H1)*	−0.178	0.057	−3.138	.002	−.178	**
PPRE ← Income Dependence	0.011	0.002	6.415	<.001	.340	***
CP ← PGCH	−0.005	0.048	−0.099	.921	−.006	ns
CP ← ALO	0.255	0.049	5.233	<.001	.295	***
CP ← PPRE	0.452	0.054	8.335	<.001	.531	***
CP ← Income Dependence *(H2)*	0.006	0.002	3.683	<.001	.196	***

Table 10 indicates the full model fit the data well by every conventional benchmark (CFI and TLI above .95, RMSEA below .05, $\chi^2/df \approx 1.46$), meaning the hypothesized structure — not just each path in isolation — is a credible account of how these constructs relate. All three hypotheses held inside the joint model: ALO → PGCH remained positive (β = .175, p = .004), PGCH → PPRE remained negative (β = −.178, p = .002), and Income Dependence → CP remained positive (β = .196, p < .001). The most theoretically consequential result is the non-significant direct path from PGCH to CP (β = −.006, p = .921) sitting alongside PPRE's strong direct effect on CP (β = .531, p < .001): this indicates PGCH's influence on precarity, if it exists at all, runs entirely *through* rent-perception rather than acting on precarity on its own, precisely the mediated "gift-framing masks extraction, and extraction produces precarity" chain the study's title proposes, now traced as a single estimable path rather than asserted as a narrative. ALO also carried its own independent, undiminished effect on CP (β = .295, p < .001) net of the other three predictors, suggesting aspiration itself is precarity-generating quite apart from its modest link to hybridity.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic Findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Table 11: Themes Identified Across 20 Interview Transcripts (Nigeria n=10, Kenya n=10)

Theme	Definition	Illustrative Quotes	Prevalence
1. Gift–Commodity Hybridity as an Actively Managed Stance	Creators consciously held both gift and payment meanings simultaneously, often for different audience segments, rather than being confused or undecided	NG01: gifts "fade fast" if she stops going LIVE, "which tells me part of it works like payment." KE08: a requested song "feels like a gift exchanged through music, even though money is also changing hands"	9/20 (45%)
2. Deferred/Opaque Awareness of Platform Commission	Creators had not been told, and had to informally reconstruct, what percentage TikTok retains	NG01: "I've never seen an official number written down anywhere. I had to piece it together from other creators." KE01: "I only recently learned how much TikTok actually keeps... I felt somewhat misled"	8/20 (40%)
3. Algorithmic Opacity Met with Fatalistic Adaptation	Rather than strategizing against the algorithm, most gave up understanding it and reframed unpredictability as environmental	NG06: "I've largely made peace with it, treating the algorithm like weather." KE01: "constantly guessing what the algorithm wants... exhausting"	12/20 (60%)
4. Precarity Beyond the Ledger: Embodied/Physical Vulnerability	Income tied to bodily capacity — a form of precarity absent from the a priori economic/algorithmic/social framework	NG08: "No safety net if I'm injured or ill is my biggest fear." KE06: injury "sidelined my training... for two months"	4/20 (20%)
5. Arbitrary Platform Governance and Unaccountable Restriction	Sudden restrictions or demonetization with unclear triggers and no real appeals process	NG04: a copyright strike "on music I didn't even realize was flagged." KE04: restriction "following a mass reporting incident... no clear appeals timeline"	10/20 (50%)
6. Continuity vs. Rupture in Entrepreneurial Identity-Work	Two distinct pathways to the "entrepreneur" label: extension of a pre-existing professional identity, or a new identity built by the platform itself	NG03: "I already thought of myself as a small business owner from the studio days." KE10: "My entrepreneurial identity predates TikTok entirely"	8/20 continuity (40%); 2/20 resisted the label outright

Table 11 reports the output of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis applied across all 11 questions and all 20 transcripts, not a question-by-question summary; each theme is a pattern recurring across multiple questions and both country sub-samples. Prevalence was derived by independently coding each transcript against each theme definition. Read together, these six themes give the quantitative model's three most important results a lived texture. Theme 1 substantiates H1's misrecognition mechanism as something creators actively perform rather than passively suffer. Themes 2 and 3 jointly explain why PGCH suppresses PPRE and why algorithmic precarity was both the highest-scoring and most uniform quantitative dimension: opacity around both commission and reach was near-universal and handled through resigned normalization rather than resistance. Theme 4 is the analysis's clearest original

contribution, identifying a form of precarity the survey instrument did not measure at all. Theme 5 supplies the concrete mechanism behind the quantitative finding that dependence, not income, predicts precarity: it is not simply having one income source, but having that source subject to sudden, unexplained, and unappealable platform decisions. Theme 6 complicates ALO: aspirational labor read two different ways depending on whether entrepreneurial identity was inherited or newly constructed by the platform, a distinction the quantitative ALO scale could not, by design, distinguish. All six themes appeared in both country sub-samples, with only their relative weighting shifting (Theme 5 somewhat more Nigeria-weighted; Theme 3 somewhat more Kenya-weighted), and no new theme emerged in transcripts beyond the twelfth interview coded, consistent with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) saturation benchmark and supporting the adequacy of the n=20 target set at the design stage.

Discussion of Findings

This study asked whether TikTok's LIVE gifting mechanism functions as a hybrid value form for entrepreneur-creators in Nigeria and Kenya, and how that hybridity relates to labour and precarity. RQ1 was answered affirmatively: PGCH clustered at the scale midpoint with wide dispersion, and the convergent-validity check established that this represents genuine conjunctive hybridity rather than a mixture of opposed populations or simple indecision. This is consistent with Appadurai's (1986) situational account of value against any fixed classification of transactions as gift or commodity. RQ2 was answered by the structural model. All three hypothesised paths held, and the mediation hypothesis added in revision was supported: PGCH → PPRE ($\beta = -.178$), PPRE → CP ($\beta = .531$), income dependence → CP ($\beta = .196$), ALO → PGCH ($\beta = .175$), with the PGCH → CP effect running almost entirely through rent perception (94% mediated). The negative PGCH–PPRE path looks, taken alone, like a clean confirmation of Bourdieu's (1977) argument that gift exchange survives only by disguising its own reciprocal logic — the reading Belk's (2014) pseudo-sharing and Duffy and Wissinger's (2017) naturalising myths would predict for a platform deploying gift language over extractive infrastructure (Srnicek, 2017; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). The interviews make that reading untenable, and this is the study's principal theoretical result.

Bourdieu's *méconnaissance* requires *unawareness* of the transaction's interested character. Theme 1 documents the opposite. NG01 does not fail to see the commercial character of gifting; she infers it from evidence, reasoning from the observation that gifts "fade fast" without continued LIVE performance to the conclusion that "part of it works like payment." KE08 holds both readings explicitly in one sentence: a requested song "feels like a gift exchanged through music, even though money is also changing hands." This is conscious, articulate, strategic ambivalence. It is not misrecognition. This study identified this as Conflict 1 between the framework's traditions and stated that the study was designed to adjudicate it. The data favour Zelizer over Bourdieu. What H1's coefficient captures is not creators being fooled but creators *choosing to keep the extractive reading unspoken rather than unknown*, precisely the relational

work Zelizer (1994, 2005) describes, in which people actively match a payment medium to a relationship type and manage the tension between intimacy and money rather than failing to perceive it.

This has a consequence the misrecognition literature does not anticipate. If gift-framing were misrecognition, the remedy would be information, tell creators what is taken and the illusion dissolves. If gift-framing is relational accomplishment, information does not dissolve it, because the framing was never a belief about commission rates in the first place. Disclosure would then change what creators *know* without changing how they *frame*, and the two would come apart visibly. The distinction is testable: it predicts that creators who learn the commission rate will not reduce their relational framing of gifting, though they will report higher PPRE. Nothing in this cross-sectional design tests it, and it is the most valuable single follow-up the study identifies. The theoretical implication for platform political economy is uncomfortable and should be stated plainly.

H3's effect was small enough to require the careful statement given supported as a direction, not as a substantive account of what drives gift-framing. Theme 6 explains why, and the explanation is more interesting than the coefficient. "Entrepreneur" identity followed two pathways: continuity from a prior professional identity (NG03: "I already thought of myself as a small business owner from the studio days"; KE10: "My entrepreneurial identity predates TikTok entirely") and rupture, in which the identity was built by and around the platform. Duffy's (2017) aspirational labour and Terranova's (2000) free labour describe the rupture pathway well and the continuity pathway poorly. Continuity-narrative creators had already absorbed entrepreneurial risk before TikTok existed; their aspiration is not platform-generated and there is no reason to expect it to sustain a platform-specific gift-framing. Averaging both pathways into a single ALO score attenuates any true relationship, a limitation the survey could not detect and the interviews expose directly. This is not a post hoc rescue of a weak finding: it is a specific, testable measurement claim, and it implies that a revised ALO instrument distinguishing the two pathways should recover a larger H3 coefficient among rupture-pathway creators specifically. Comaroff and Comaroff's (2000) account of millennial capitalism, the proliferation of speculative routes to wealth alongside severe insecurity, fits the rupture pathway more precisely than Duffy's original US-based formulation, which was developed among aspirants with fallback options that most of this sample does not have. That is a substantive difference in the construct, not a contextual footnote, and it is one respect in which the African case revises rather than merely extends the source literature. A separate result deserves emphasis because it cuts against the framing of aspiration as consolation: ALO carried a strong, independent effect on precarity ($\beta = .295$) net of everything else in the model. Aspiration is not merely a belief that makes precarity bearable. On these

data it is *itself precarity-generating*, a finding consistent with Duffy and Wissinger's (2017) mythologies argument but stronger than it, since the effect survives controls for both income dependence and rent perception.

H2's finding, that income dependence, not total income, predicts precarity across all three sub-dimensions, gains its mechanism from Theme 5. Restrictions and demonetisations arriving with no explanation and no functioning appeal mean that dependence is not an undiversified portfolio but exposure to unaccountable power. This is consistent with van Doorn's (2017) structural account of platform-labour inequality, Gillespie's (2018) analysis of opaque governance, Zeng and Kaye's (2022) account of visibility moderation as TikTok's characteristic control mode, and Couldry and Mejias's (2019) data-colonialism framing.

The identified Conflict 2 as to do with precarity frameworks code dependence as vulnerability. The data support both, at different levels, and the split is instructive. Quantitatively, dependence behaves exactly as the precarity literature predicts, monotonic, dose-responsive, present across all three sub-dimensions. Qualitatively, the affective register is not simply fear. KE01's report of feeling "somewhat misled" is a complaint of *broken expectation*, which presupposes a felt entitlement to fair dealing rather than a purely instrumental relation to a service. Dependence here appears to be experienced as a relationship with obligations that the stronger party is failing, and only secondarily as risk exposure. Anwar and Graham's (2020, 2021) African gig-worker studies and Kusimba's (2021) account of Kenyan mobile money as embedded in local rather than platform-controlled trust explain why exposure was unevenly distributed, and develops the asymmetry: Kenyan concerns clustered on algorithmic governance, Nigerian concerns on enforcement events, an asymmetry the pooled SEM cannot detect and which country analysis is designed to test. That algorithmic precarity was simultaneously the quantitative model's highest-scoring and least-variable dimension and the qualitative data's most widely distributed theme, with 60% describing fatalistic rather than resistant adaptation, consistent with Bishop's (2018, 2019) accounts of algorithmic opacity — suggests this is the dimension creators have most fully *normalised* rather than merely tolerated. Case 2 proposes a process account of how that normalisation occurs.

The clearest limitation the interviews expose is a precarity dimension the survey did not measure. Vocal strain, injury, and illness with no sick leave appeared in a fifth of transcripts and correspond to none of the economic, algorithmic, or social dimensions instrumented. This is not an additional item for a future scale. It is a structural problem for the model reported. The SEM's clean mediation of PGCH's effect on precarity entirely through PPRE cannot be the whole story if a real precarity pathway — tied to the

physical demands of sustained LIVE performance, echoing the affective-labour toll documented by Wohn, Freeman, and McLaughlin (2018) and Johnson and Woodcock (2019) on Twitch and by Craig, Lin, and Cunningham (2021) among *wanghong* creators, and resting on the parasocial foundation Horton and Wohl (1956) first named — bypasses PGCH, PPRE, and income dependence altogether. A model can be well-fitting and mis-specified at the same time, and good fit indices are evidence about the covariance structure among *measured* variables only. The conversion chain, is similarly unmeasured. Both omissions are recorded. Embodied precarity also has an analytic property the other three dimensions lack: it is not mediated by perception. Economic, algorithmic, and social precarity are all measured as *perceived* insecurity and are all, in the model, downstream of how a creator frames the transaction. A voice that gives out is not downstream of framing. This makes embodied precarity a limit case for the entire hybrid-value-form apparatus, which is a theory about meaning-management, and it marks the point where the study's framework stops explaining and Abidin's (2021) "visibility labour," in its physical dimension, takes over.

Implications are drawn out of this study as follows, ordered by how well the evidence supports them. First, mandatory disclosure of the effective retained share. Theme 2 documents a straightforward information failure: creators reconstruct the commission informally, from each other, and some learn it only after years of participation. A requirement to state the effective creator share — after coin pricing, diamond conversion, and currency conversion, not before — would remedy a deficit the evidence clearly establishes. The study caution applies: disclosure may raise perceived extraction and therefore measured precarity, and honest advocacy should acknowledge that it substitutes informed discomfort for uninformed exposure rather than making anyone better off in the short run.

Secondly, due-process requirements for enforcement**.** Theme 5 concerns not the terms but their application, and it is the mechanism behind the study's most robust quantitative finding. Requirements to state a reason for a restriction, to specify an appeal route, and to bind the platform to a response window would address what Zeng and Kaye (2022) identify as TikTok's characteristic control mode. This is the implication the evidence supports most strongly, because it targets the precise mechanism connecting dependence to precarity. Thirdly, attention to the conversion chain, not just the commission**.** The study argued that the African case differs at the conversion chain, and Guyer's (2004) analysis locates value capture at the boundaries between value scales. Regulatory attention focused solely on the platform's headline commission would miss the currency-conversion and cash-out layers where a substantial and undisclosed share of value is lost. This implication follows from the framework and is *not*

directly tested by the data, and it is flagged as such. Collective action and its limits**.** The fatalism documented in Theme 3 is a barrier to the collective response that a structural analysis would ordinarily recommend, and it would be dishonest to recommend organising without noting that this study found the disposition that makes organising hard. Anwar and Graham (2020) document forms of covert agency among African gig workers that do not require formal organisation, and that is the more realistic model here. What the data support is a narrower point: because dependence rather than income drives precarity, interventions that expand *alternative* income channels, cross-platform portability, direct fan-payment rails outside the coin system, local advertiser access, would reduce precarity more than interventions that increase gifting income within the existing architecture.

Conclusion

A viewer sends a virtual rose. A few taps later it is a fraction of a shilling in a mobile-money wallet, having passed through a coin price the platform sets, a diamond rate the platform sets, a dollar conversion, a local-currency conversion, and an agent who knows the recipient's name. This study finds that the creator at the end of that chain is usually right about what happened, in a way the critical literature has not credited. She knows the transfer is partly a payment, because she can see that it stops when she stops performing. She knows it is partly a gift, because she knows what it means to the person who sent it. She does not know what proportion the platform kept, because no one has told her. Her hybrid reading is not confusion between two categories; it is an accurate description of a transaction that genuinely occupies both, held by someone denied one of the facts that would let her price it. The platform's position is secured not by convincing her otherwise but by the gap between the level she can see and the level she cannot. Gift and rent are not stages in a sequence. They are the two levels of a single arrangement, and it is the distance between them, rather than any misunderstanding on her part, that keeps it in place.

Limitation

We already indicated some limitations in the methodology. However, in capsule words, limitations include the cross-sectional design, which precludes causal mediation (reversal plausible), and the non-probability snowball sampling, which limits generalizability, likely excludes exited creators, and risks network-homogeneity compressing variance on PPRE/CPA. Country allocation was comparison-oriented, not proportional. Subgroups like the 45+ bracket are underpowered. Unmeasured constructs such as the cash-conversion chain, embodied precarity, and parasocial controls, leave key pathways untested; PPRE

captures perception only and future studies can explore this limitation. Finally, findings are temporally bound to TikTok's rapidly shifting monetization rules, necessitating longitudinal/experimental follow-ups.

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Ethical Statement

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Also, ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Ethical Committee, and all participants gave informed consent before proceeding. For the quantitative strand, the questionnaire was hosted on an online survey platform, and the link was distributed directly to identified creators through TikTok comments and direct messages, and shared within Nigerian and Kenyan creator community groups.

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