



Social Media and the Commodification of Reactions: Batik's TikTok Live and Economic Attention

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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji fenomena komodifikasi reaksi dalam siaran langsung penjualan batik di TikTok, sebuah praktik yang berkembang pesat di Indonesia. Dalam kerangka ekonomi perhatian, respons emosional pengguna—mulai dari komentar, hadiah virtual, hingga ekspresi kagum atau marah—telah berubah menjadi aset yang dapat dimonetisasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode netnografi dan analisis konten, dengan fokus pada tiga host ternama: Farhan (72 Batik), Rama (Batik Nawilis), dan Tulus (Sanarakarta Batik). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa para host ini bukan sekadar penjual, melainkan pelaku budaya digital yang membangun narasi, merancang skenario visual, dan mengelola emosi audiens secara strategis untuk meraih visibilitas dan pendapatan. Praktik komodifikasi reaksi ini membawa implikasi sosial dan budaya yang kompleks: di satu sisi membuka peluang ekonomi bagi pelaku budaya lokal, namun di sisi lain berisiko mereduksi makna batik sebagai warisan budaya menjadi tontonan semata dalam logika algoritmik. Secara teoretis, studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada wacana ekonomi afeksi dan kerja budaya digital di Asia Tenggara. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menunjukkan efektivitas netnografi dalam menangkap interaksi emosional secara real-time di dalam platform digital. Pada akhirnya, artikel ini menyajikan refleksi kritis mengenai keberlanjutan budaya, performativitas digital, dan tantangan etis dalam praktik komersialisasi budaya di media sosial.

Abstract

This article explores the phenomenon of reaction commodification in live batik sales broadcasts on TikTok, a rapidly growing practice in Indonesia. Within the framework of the attention economy, users' emotional responses—ranging from comments and virtual gifts to expressions of awe or outrage—have been transformed into monetizable assets. Employing a qualitative approach with netnographic methods and content analysis, this study focuses on three prominent hosts: Farhan (72 Batik), Rama (Batik Nawilis), and Tulus (Sanarakarta Batik). The findings reveal that these individuals function not merely as sellers, but as digital cultural performers who construct narratives, orchestrate visual scenarios, and strategically engage viewer emotions to attract visibility and income. This commodification of reactions carries complex social and cultural implications: it provides economic opportunities for local cultural actors while simultaneously risking the reduction of batik's cultural significance into algorithm-driven spectacle. Theoretically, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on affective economies and digital cultural labor in Southeast Asia. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of

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netnography in capturing real-time, emotionally charged interactions within platformized environments. Ultimately, this article offers critical insights into the intersection of cultural sustainability, digital performance, and ethical challenges in social media commerce.

Introduction

In the past two decades, human civilization has undergone a profound shift in the ways people communicate and access information. Social media has become the primary medium for building social networks, expressing identities, and distributing cultural discourse. This phenomenon not only reflects advancements in communication technologies but also marks a fundamental change in how attention is managed, identities are constructed, and culture is simultaneously produced and consumed (Jenkins, 2006).

TikTok has emerged as one of the most dominant platforms in the contemporary digital landscape. As a short video and real-time interaction-based application, TikTok enables the rapid and widespread circulation of cultural content. Its algorithmic power allows anyone to become the center of attention, if they can deliver captivating sensations. In such an ecosystem, visual appeal, emotional expression, and personal narratives become key factors in attracting netizens' attention (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

In the digital space of TikTok, attention is not merely a means but a commodity. This phenomenon has long been discussed in the framework of the attention economy, where user attention is treated as a scarce and valuable resource (Davenport & Beck, 2001). Every second of user attention carries economic value that can be monetized through clicks, interactions, purchases, or virtual gifting. As a result, content creators compete fiercely to

capture audience attention using increasingly creative and manipulative tactics.

With the growing popularity of live streaming on TikTok, digital communication has transformed into a more performative and speculative form. Live broadcasts are no longer simply spaces for sharing information; they have become stages for dramatization and emotional intensification. Viewers are not just passive recipients but active participants in meaning-making through comments, likes, and digital gifts. This has led to the emergence of a practice known as the commodification of reactions—where expressions of empathy and audience emotions are capitalized as sources of income for content creators (Mosco, 2009; Cakrawala et al., 2024).

This condition is clearly visible in TikTok's live batik streams, a unique phenomenon in which local cultural actors such as Farhan (72 Batik), Rama (Batik Nawilis), and Tulus (Sanarakarta Batik) utilize social media as a stage for marketing and cultural performance. In their live sessions, they not only sell batik but also deliver personal narratives, emotional conflicts, and communicative styles that stimulate audience reactions. Digital gifts such as roses, whales, lions, necklaces, crowns, hats, sunglasses, cute cats, and garlands often become indicators of the success of their performances, rather than just the sales achievement.

This phenomenon arouses contradiction. On one hand, live streaming batik on TikTok can be seen as a modern approach to cultural preservation. On the other hand, it reveals the reduction of cultural value into mere content that must "entertain" and sometimes even "beg for gifts" to survive the algorithmic competition. Local culture such as batik is subjected to the pressures of digital capitalism, which demands speed, impression, and sensationalism.

Studies such as those by Fandia et al. (2024) note that "online begging" content on TikTok is often strategically designed with narratives of suffering or sentimentality to elicit empathy that leads to gifting. In this context, batik is not just a product being sold—it becomes a backdrop for the capitalization of emotion. Audiences are not merely buying goods; they are "paying" their feelings in the form of digital gifts. Thus, the attention economy operates through subtle yet exploitative mechanisms on social and affective relationships.

In response to these tendencies, this study critically examines how users' emotional reactions in TikTok's batik live streams are commodified within the framework of the attention economy. It also seeks to understand how these digital practices reconstruct the

meaning of batik as local culture and their impact on identity narratives, cultural sustainability, and the ethics of content production in Indonesia's digital society.

This study offers a unique contribution by integrating theories of attention economy, emotional commodification, and digital cultural representation into a single netnographic analysis of TikTok batik live stream. Unlike prior holistic exploration of how cultural performances are algorithmically optimized and emotionally charged to elicit monetary reactions from viewers. By centering the analysis on three culturally embedded hosts Farhan, Rama and Tulus this research captures the nuanced dramaturgy of digital empathy within the Indonesian context.

The urgency of this research lies in the growing entanglement between cultural preservation and platform-driven capitalism in Southeast Asia. As intangible heritage like batik becomes increasingly embedded in algorithmic spaces, there is a pressing need to interrogate how traditional values are restructured—or potentially diluted—for the sake of virality and monetization. This study not only highlights the complex implications of emotional labor and digital performativity but also invites critical reflection on the ethics and sustainability of local culture in the era of platform economies.

Popular Culture and Social Media

Popular culture is an arena where meaning and identity are constructed, negotiated, and disseminated. John Storey (2009), in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, emphasizes that popular culture not only reflects society but also shapes and is influenced by dominant economic and political forces. In the context of social media, platforms like TikTok provide new spaces for the production and consumption of popular culture, where users act not only as passive consumers but also as active producers of cultural content.

TikTok, with its live streaming feature, facilitates real-time interaction between content creators and their audiences. It creates a new dynamic in the production and consumption of popular culture, blurring the line between producers and consumers. Users do not merely consume content; they participate in the creation of cultural meaning and value through active participation.

Popular culture is no longer solely produced by major cultural industries, but also by individuals and communities utilizing digital platforms to express themselves and build their

cultural identities. This creates new opportunities for preserving and transforming local cultures in a globalized context.

However, it dynamic also brings challenges, especially related to the commodification of culture and the economic exploitation of user participation. On TikTok, user attention and interaction can be monetized through mechanisms such as virtual gifting, which blurs the line between cultural expression and economic transaction.

Therefore, it is essential to understand how popular culture is constructed and commodified within social media platforms and its implications for cultural identity, social participation, and the dynamic digital economic.

The Attention Economy and the Commodification of Reactions

The concept of the attention economy explains how human attention has become a scarce commodity contested within the digital media landscape (Davenport & Beck, 2001). On TikTok, the live streaming feature allows real-time interaction between creators and viewers, where emotional reactions such as empathy and sympathy can be monetized via virtual gifts. This represents a process of commodifying reactions, where audience emotional expressions are converted into economic value (Mosco, 2009).

Cakrawala et al. (2024), in *IPTEK-KOM Journal*, describes the 'online begging' phenomenon as leveraging audience empathy to gain financial benefit through gifting. Similarly, Fandia et al. (2024) in the *Journal of Communication Sciences* highlights the strategic use of suffering narratives to draw attention and financial support. These phenomena reveal that emotional reactions have become tradable commodities in social media ecosystems.

Hidayat (2023) adds that modern social media logic often operates within simulation and hyperreality, where emotions are no longer authentic but engineered for heightened engagement. In the context of TikTok live, poverty, tears, and sentimentalism become performative elements transacted with the audience. This aligns with Baudrillard's critique that the media no longer represents reality but fabricates a simulacrum for consumption.

Azmi and Astari (2024) reinforce this view by illustrating how gifting is frequently based on empathy effects that are strategically crafted by creators. Hence, the attention economy on TikTok is closely tied to an emotional economy mediated by algorithms.

Thus, the attention economy must be understood as a complex, multidimensional value production system that relies on the manipulation of affect, impression speed, and virality logic.

Commodification in the Context of TikTok Live Streaming

TikTok's live streaming has become a significant phenomenon within social media ecosystems. This feature enables content creators to interact directly with audiences and monetize their attention through virtual gifts. In this process, commodification applies not only to content but also to audience reactions and interactions.

As Mosco (2009) explains, commodification involves the transformation of use value into exchange value, whereby something previously lacking economic value becomes a commodity. On TikTok live streams, emotional reactions—such as empathy, sympathy, or sentiment—are monetized commodities.

Research by Yuliana and Prasetyo (2023) finds that the batik shopping experience in live commerce is driven more by emotional engagement with the host than by the product itself. Purchasing becomes a form of social participation in the host's narrative.

Another study by Cakrawala et al. (2024) shows that creators frequently use emotional storytelling and dramatic conflicts as strategies to generate interactions and gifts. This raises ethical questions about emotional exploitation.

Thus, it is crucial to critically examine how commodification operates within TikTok live streaming and its implications for content production ethics and the relationship between creators and audiences.

Integration of Local Culture in Digital Media

The integration of local culture into digital media is a prominent phenomenon in the globalization era. TikTok serves as an expressive medium that allows local culture to appear on a global stage. However, its representation is not always neutral.

Sari and Wulandari (2023) argue that the visualization of batik in live streams fosters emotional connections with global audiences but is vulnerable to aestheticization that neglects batik's philosophical context. Creators often prioritize selling over cultural education.

Rahmawati and Nugroho (2022) highlight how local culture is commodified in comedy content on Instagram. Cultural representations are often simplified and symbolically

violated to align with digital market tastes. This reinforces the need for caution in bringing cultural symbols into algorithmic spaces.

The works of Dr. Octo Dendy Andriyanto emphasize the importance of community engagement and educational value in cultural representation. For instance, the E-Srambahan app introduces traditional Javanese songs (macapat) in digital form while preserving their original value.

Therefore, cultural digitization strategies must combine value preservation, media adaptation, and digital literacy as an emerging cultural ecology system.

Method

Research Approach and Type

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using netnographic methods. Netnography allows researchers to deeply understand digital cultural practices within online communities (Kozinets, 2010). The study aims to reveal how emotional reactions are commodified in TikTok's live batik broadcasts and the resulting social and cultural implications within the attention economy framework.

Research Location and Subjects

The research focuses on TikTok accounts that actively engage in live Batik sales, including the 72 Batik account hosted by Farhan, Sanarakarta Batik hosted by Tulus, and Batik Nawilis hosted by Rama. These accounts were selected purposively based on criteria such as frequency of live streaming, volume of audience interaction, and presence of gift-giving practices as indicators of audience reaction.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through digital documentation, including live TikTok recordings, screenshots of interactions, reactions from other accounts, and video clips reposted by fan accounts and user comments. Additionally, the researcher conducted passive participant observation by following these accounts' activities over a full month. Supplementary data were obtained from online news and supporting literature studies.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and semiotic interpretation to unpack the symbolic meanings within digital interactions. The researcher mapped out the patterns of reaction commodification, host narrative structures, and the emotional connections

built between creators and audiences. The analytical model is grounded in the theories of attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001) and commodification (Mosco, 2009).

Data Validity

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation, technique triangulation, and theory triangulation. Validity was further strengthened by comparing observational findings with previous studies and reflecting on the researcher's positionality in interpreting data to avoid subjective bias.

Results and Discussion

Visual Dynamics, Host Style, Music Selection, and Live Scenarios as Attention-Grabbing Strategies

A study by Kurniawati and Sari (2023) on fashion-based TikTok live commerce indicates that attention-grabbing strategies—such as carefully curated visuals, emotionally resonant music, and host charisma—significantly increase audience retention and virtual gift conversion. Their findings emphasize the importance of sensory and affective elements in shaping viewers' decision-making processes. This framework supports the case of Farhan, Rama, and Tulus, who each apply distinct aesthetic and communicative techniques to captivate audiences.

Farhan (72 Batik), Rama (Batik Nawilis), and Tulus (Sanarakarta Batik) have successfully transformed TikTok live into captivating visual performances. They do more than sell batik—they craft visual and performative narratives that capture the attention of thousands of viewers during each session.

Visually, Farhan often uses bright lighting and clean backgrounds. Batik products are neatly displayed behind the host with camera angles that emphasize motif details and color vibrancy. Rama incorporates traditional elements like soft gamelan music, occasionally mixed with upbeat DJ tracks and humorous interludes, while Tulus employs warm lighting and uses his batik workspace as a narrative backdrop.

The hosts' personal styles also play a crucial role. Farhan is known for his soft-spoken demeanor and structured speech, earning him the nickname "mas soft spoken" among viewers. He often inserts philosophical meanings behind batik motifs. Rama, on the other hand, is loud and spontaneous, often responding to audience requests—even angrily—which earns him the moniker "mas tantrum." Tulus adopts a more emotional approach, frequently

saying "no gift gift" after receiving gifts, building a bridge of empathy, especially when featuring traditional or trendy batik pieces. This behavior has earned him the nickname "No gift gift."

Music choice contributes to the emotional atmosphere. Farhan opts for soft, low-volume music to maintain focus on the host and product explanation. Rama and Tulus prefer remix dangdut or lo-fi Javanese pop, creating reflective or celebratory moods that help retain viewer attention.

Each host carefully designs their live session scenario. Farhan starts with an enthusiastic greeting, then introduces the product calmly. His modesty often triggers playful responses from viewers, increasing engagement and gift-sending. Tulus uses narrative arcs tied to personal stories or moral lessons and explains products in detail. Rama integrates educational segments on batik motifs between offers. These approaches demonstrate that the hosts are not just sellers, but cultural performers packaging commerce in aesthetic and emotional experiences.

Commodification of Reactions: Gifts as Emotional Currency

Similar patterns are observed in research by Pratama (2023), who found that TikTok live creators strategically shape emotional arcs to guide viewers toward gifting behavior, creating a cycle of emotional labor and financial return. This reinforces the idea that gifts function as emotional currency, translating empathy and affect into quantifiable income. Furthermore, Azmi and Astari (2024) emphasized that audience gifting is often triggered by perceived emotional vulnerability or sincerity, both of which are tactically performed.

On TikTok, gifting is not merely a form of interaction but a commodification of emotional responses. In the case of live batik sessions, gifts from viewers represent responses to the hosts' performances, expressions, or narratives. Thus, the hosts' performance plays a vital role in eliciting empathy, sympathy, or emotional connection.

Each host has developed a signature persona. Farhan is dubbed "soft spoken" for his calm yet firm tone, interspersed with subtle humor that builds emotional closeness. Rama is known as "tantrum" for his explosive emotional displays, whether disappointment over few gifts or exaggerated joy when receiving large ones making his streams tense and often viral. Tulus, known for "no gift gift," builds connections based on sincerity and inner narratives,

relying on meaningful interactions rather than emotional pressure. This term became a hashtag among his fan community to appreciate his humanist approach.

These hosts, in different ways, convert audience reactions into emotional capital. Virtual gifts are not just support symbols but emotional currencies reflecting viewers' affective responses to host performance and communication. Commodification here operates subtly through narratives, gestures, and expressions carefully curated to produce economic value in digital spaces.

The Attention Economy and the Race for Spotlight

A study by Saragih (2021) on brand collaborations in TikTok live shopping shows that influencers who successfully maintain personal branding while engaging in commercial partnerships tend to outperform others in visibility and retention metrics. The cases of Farhan and Tulus appearing in KAHF-sponsored events and national media further validate this intersection of celebrity culture and commodified attention. However, as Rahmawati (2023) noted, conflicts and reputation damage—such as that between Rama and Ricis—can destabilize this ecosystem, highlighting the volatile nature of attention-based economies.

In TikTok's ecosystem, attention is the primary commodity contested by creators, brands, and media outlets. Live batik hosts like Farhan, Rama, and Tulus have monetized this attention through collaborations with brands and mainstream media.

They often appear together in live sessions, creating synergy that boosts viewer numbers and engagement. For instance, one session uploaded by @acaaalee featured all three and attracted over 100,000 viewers.

Collaborations with brands expand their reach and sales. Farhan and Tulus have appeared in live sessions sponsored by the men's grooming brand KAHF. Such collaborations not only bring financial gains but also strengthen their image as influential digital figures. They have also made appearances on national TV shows like *Lapor Pak*, *Pagi-Pagi Ambyar*, and *Rumpi No Secret* on TransTV.

However, this race for attention can also spark conflict. One notable case involved a feud between Rama and influencer Ria Ricis, stemming from a failed collaboration where Ricis felt disrespected by Rama's team. The incident went viral and sparked online debate.

Such conflicts illustrate the fragility of public image in the attention economy. Batik live hosts are not just sellers—they are digital celebrities who must manage relationships with various stakeholders.

Thus, brand and media collaborations have reshaped the landscape of TikTok batik lives. Hosts now build personal branding and complex social networks while facing intense competition and reputational risks.

Local Culture and Global Pull

Research by Oktarina et al. (2022) demonstrated how TikTok reconfigures the presentation of local culture to fit global consumption logic, often through simplification or dramatization. Similarly, Sari and Wulandari (2023) found that while batik live streams increased international recognition, they frequently neglected batik's philosophical dimensions, reducing it to surface-level ornamentation. This echoes the concerns of Rahmawati and Nugroho (2022), who warned that commodification may detach cultural symbols from their socio-historical roots, transforming heritage into pure spectacle.

TikTok's live batik phenomenon represents not only digital commerce but the convergence of local culture with global digital platforms. Hosts like Farhan, Rama, and Tulus are more than sellers—they are cultural ambassadors presenting Javanese identity in globally accessible formats.

Through batik aesthetics, language, and background music, they bring local elements to the global stage. Previously confined to exhibitions or boutiques, batik is now showcased in festive, interactive live formats. Tulus, for instance, frames batik motifs such as *parang* with philosophical and spiritual interpretations.

At the same time, TikTok's algorithm-driven global logic demands trend conformity, fast communication, and visual punch. Hosts adapt by incorporating global language (“Hi bestie!”, “Thank you Korea!”), visuals, and tempo. This reflects a balancing act between preserving local values and meeting global audience expectations.

Cross-border engagement includes partnerships with international brands, batik exports, and responses from Indonesian diasporas who purchase batik online. Batik is no longer strictly local—it has become part of global culture through digital mediation.

However, this transformation carries risks. Cultural meanings may be simplified or trivialized. Batik motifs are sometimes referenced only by name or color, without historical or philosophical context. This raises concerns over reducing deep cultural values into mere consumable “content.”

Thus, TikTok live batik shows the push-pull between cultural preservation and adaptation in global digital ecosystems. Hosts consciously or unconsciously navigate a crossroads: cultural guardians or global entertainment innovators?

Researcher’s Reflection and Future Directions

The need for interdisciplinary exploration is echoed by Hidayat and Nisa (2022), who advocate for integrating communication studies with emotional economics to fully capture how creators, platforms, and audiences co-produce affective value. Moreover, the call for gender and power analysis finds support in Andriyanto (2020), who highlighted how digital performance often reinforces unequal emotional labor expectations across identities and class backgrounds.

As a researcher who has observed this phenomenon from its early stages, I believe that the commodification of reactions in TikTok batik live streams is not merely about monetizing emotions, it is a survival strategy in the saturated digital attention market. It signifies a new emotional communication mode that merges values, performance, and economics. This marks a shift in hosts’ roles from sellers to digital empathy generators.

However, further exploration is needed regarding the long-term psychosocial effects of the attention economy, especially on both audiences and creators. Do these interactions end after the broadcast, or do they form broader social bonds? Do gifts create emotional dependency or foster digital solidarity?

I also observe that popular culture studies in social media have yet to deeply examine how localities like batik evolve into global reaction objects. This offers opportunities for cross-platform cultural transformation studies and how it affects identity. Do batik narratives on TikTok retain their essence or shift meaning to fit algorithmic demands?

Going forward, commodification of reactions in the attention economy context should be studied further through gender, affective, and power relations lenses between creators and platforms. Mapping the connections between gifts, algorithms, and viewer motivation could

lead to interdisciplinary approaches combining cultural studies, communication, and digital media research.

Thus, this reflection not only concludes the discussion but also lays a foundation for expanding digital culture research in Indonesia, particularly within micro-spaces like TikTok's live batik scenes rich in social, economic, and symbolic dynamics.

Conclusion

This study reveals that TikTok's batik live sessions go beyond mere commercial transactions—they serve as performative arenas where hosts act as digital cultural agents. By combining visual strategies, communication styles, music selection, and structured live scenarios, the hosts establish emotional closeness with their audiences. Within this framework, the commodification of reactions—manifested through gift-giving—emerges as a form of emotional currency in the attention economy ecosystem.

The live batik phenomenon on TikTok demonstrates the tension between preserving local culture and adapting to the global logic of social media. Hosts like Farhan, Rama, and Tulus exemplify how local cultural elements can be repackaged for digital platforms to gain visibility, often through collaborations with brands and mainstream media. However, this process also highlights complexities in power relations, self-image, and the struggle between authenticity and performativity.

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