

**MEMETIC DIALECTICS AND AGENT HABITUS THROUGH
COMMODIFICATION AND REALITY CONSTRUCTION IN PROVERTY
PORN CONTENT VIDEOS ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

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(Naskah diterima: 1 Juli 2025, disetujui: 28 Juli 2025)

Abstract

This research focuses on videos containing proverty porn or poverty pornography found on social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok. This means that poor people are portrayed in YouTube and TikTok videos as content to be exploited for financial gain. The phenomenon of proverty porn presented on social media, in this context, is related to agents a term Pierre Bourdieu uses for actors as content creators of video content. Therefore, this research utilizes the concepts and theories of memetics, habitus, commodification, and the construction of media reality. The use of memetics and habitus concepts reflects the dialectic that occurs within agents or content creators in creating video content. The dialectic within agents becomes significant when habits (habitus) and memetics (imitation) engage in a dialectical process or have a reciprocal relationship. The results of the study show that repeated habits are also repeated imitations to create video content continuously simply because they can become commodities. All incidents of poverty that occur are constructed as reality in the media.

Keyword: *memetics, habitus, commodification, construction of reality, social media*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada video konten yang mengandung *proverty porn* atau pornografi kemiskinan yang terdapat di media sosial YouTube dan TikTok. Artinya, para kaum atau orang miskin ditampilkan di video YouTube dan Tiktok sebagai konten untuk dieksploitasi demi mendapatkan keuntungan finansial. Fenomena *proverty porn* yang disajikan di media sosial, dalam konteks ini, terkait dengan agen – istilah yang digunakan Pierre Bourdieu untuk pelaku – sebagai konten kreator pembuat video konten. Untuk itu, penelitian ini menggunakan konsep dan teori memetika, habitus, komodifikasi, dan konstruksi realitas media. penggunaan konsep memetika dan habitus merupakan dialektika yang terjadi pada diri agen atau konten kreator dalam membuat video konten. Dialektika pada diri agen menjadi signifikan, ketika kebiasaan (habitus) dan memetika (peniruan) berproses secara dialektika atau memiliki hubungan timbul balik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, kebiasaan yang berulang pun merupakan peniruan yang berulang untuk membuat video konten secara terus-menerus hanya karena dapat menjadi komoditas. Segala peristiwa tentang kemiskinan yang terjadi dikonstruksi sebagai realitas di media.

Kata kunci: memetika, habitus, komodifikasi, konstruksi realitas, media sosial

I. INTRODUCTION



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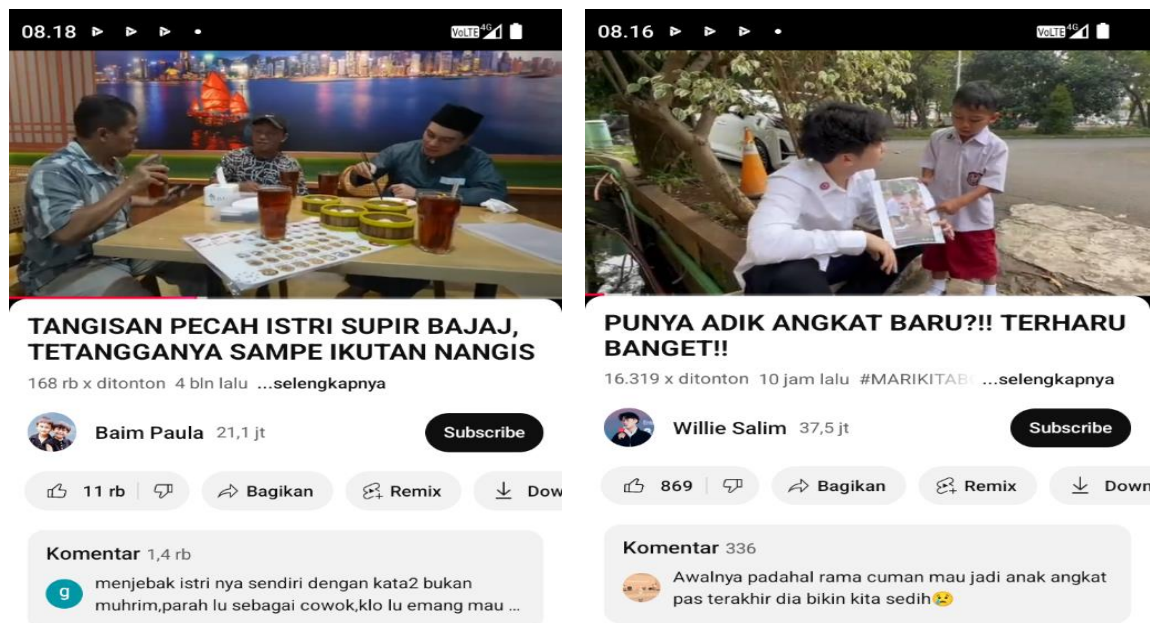
The presence of digital media, particularly social media platforms, has sparked a diverse range of creative content creations for broadcast. Social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become primary platforms for creators to distribute various types of content. In this context, creators act as agents, a term coined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, actively producing and distributing content to audiences tailored to their needs and preferences. The range of content produced is diverse, ranging from education and information, entertainment and creativity, to content depicting everyday personal life. Content with current and trending themes is also quite popular with many social media users, making it a type of content that easily goes viral. One type of video content that frequently goes viral is that depicting the lives of the poor.

These videos depict various vignettes of the lives of underprivileged communities, such as beggars being given money, people bathing in mud as entertainment or in exchange for rewards, and poor students striving to achieve success. Furthermore, there is also content depicting the conditions of poor people living in simple shacks. This type of content is often referred to as poverty porn. Poverty porn refers to the practice of portraying poverty in dramatic and exaggerated ways to garner public sympathy. In such presentations, poverty is synonymous with misfortune and the hardships of a life of economic deprivation. Poverty is then exploited as attention-grabbing content to attract as many viewers as possible. This transforms poverty into a commodity sold for media profit.

The poverty porn phenomenon is not unique to social media. Long before, television has aired various programs depicting the lives of the poor for the purpose of generating high ratings and advertising. Programs such as *Bedah Rumah* (House Renovation), *Orang Pinggiran* (Surrounding People), *Uang Kaget* (Surprise Money), and *Minta Bantu* (Asking for Help) are examples of programs that use a similar approach to attract viewers. Poverty porn content has also emerged on social media, particularly within the current affairs and trending content categories, often popularized through Hashtag Challenges. The presentation takes the form of news or feature formats, packaged in a way that is appealing and easily accessible to a wide audience. Thus, poverty shows, once popular on television, can now also be enjoyed on digital platforms.

The audience for this type of content on social media is enormous. For example, Baim Paula's YouTube channel has over 21.1 million subscribers, while Willie Salim's channel has around 37.5 million. These figures demonstrate the high level of audience interest and

engagement in content depicting poverty in its various forms. This phenomenon has opened up important discussions about how poverty is commodified in the digital age and how such content is produced and consumed by society. Questions regarding the ethics and social impact of presenting poverty as entertainment are also highly relevant for further study. With the abundance of poverty-related content circulating, it is crucial to understand how audiences interpret and respond to such broadcasts.



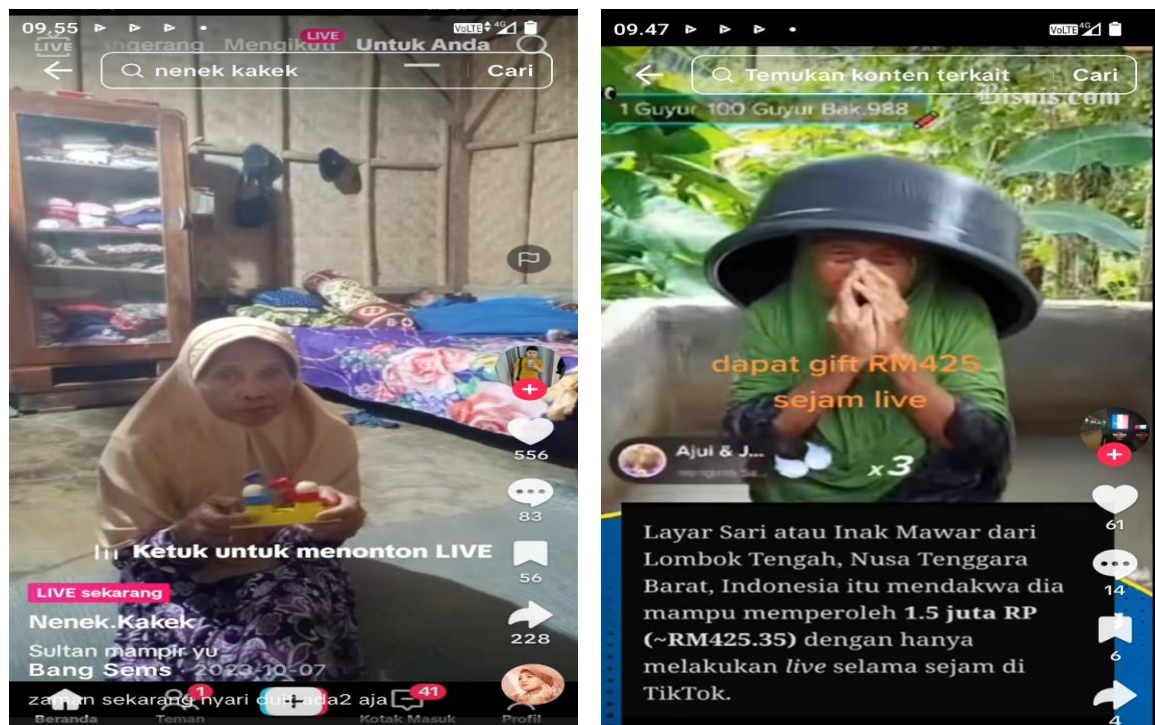
The Poverty Porn Content video on Baim Paula's channel was watched 168 thousand times and WillieSalim's was watched 16,319 thousand times on YouTube.

The rise of news and content containing poverty porn has led to a growing number of news stories and related features on various social media platforms. This is in line with the growing number of content creators and social media users who enjoy and consume poverty porn. The popularity of this content has triggered a massive imitation phenomenon, particularly in the form of memes and videos by agents or content creators active on social media. This research focuses on the dialectic between memes and the habitus of content creator agents on two popular social media platforms: YouTube and TikTok. The selection of these two platforms was based on their distinct characteristics. YouTube generally features longer content, although it also features short-form videos, and has a strict monetization system and algorithm for selecting and recommending content to users.

Meanwhile, TikTok is known for its shorter video length and faster format, thus differing in the production and consumption of its content from YouTube. These differences

in duration and distribution mechanisms are important to analyze in understanding how poverty porn is produced and received on each platform. The phenomenon of portraying poverty or someone's misfortune as a visual medium can also be understood from a psychological perspective, particularly through the concept of *Schadenfreude*. This term refers to a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction that arises from witnessing the suffering or hardship of others, including the poor (Dijk & Ouwerkerk, 2014). This explains why content depicting the hardships of life can attract attention and become a source of entertainment for some audiences.

Therefore, this study seeks to understand the phenomenon of poverty porn presented through video content on digital platforms, particularly on social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok. The analysis will examine how this content is produced by content creators, how memes, as a form of imitation, play a role in amplifying the content's distribution, and how audiences receive and respond to this phenomenon.



Two Grandmothers Turned into Online Beggars by Content Creators

In this research on poverty porn videos, the author uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and memetics, a philosophical concept introduced by Richard Dawkins, as a dialectic within content creators or agents—a term Bourdieu uses in structuration theory. This approach aims to understand how agents, as social media actors, shape content production patterns based on their habits and social environment.

Furthermore, this research utilizes Vincent Mosco's commodification theory to uncover the capitalist practices behind the poverty porn phenomenon. Through this theory, the author reconstructs the reality shaped by content creators in producing poverty porn as a commodity on social media. This type of content can garner a significant number of viewers and become an attractive economic selling point.

This phenomenon has further fueled the widespread distribution of similar content on social media through memetic mechanisms or imitation practices. In other words, the success of poverty porn content not only encourages its reproduction by other content creators but also shapes collective behavioral patterns in the production and consumption of this type of content in the digital world.

II. THEORETICAL STUDIES

This research incorporates the phenomena of Memetics and Habitus into agents' roles in creating social media content as commodities and reconstructing the reality presented to users or viewers. The phenomenon of poverty porn, related to the use of commodification theory and semiotic analysis, has been extensively researched. However, research that utilizes the combined concepts and theories of habitus, memetics, commodification, and reality construction theory is still rare.

Therefore, to strengthen the theoretical basis of this research, the author outlines several relevant previous studies, particularly those addressing the theme of commodification and using a semiotic analysis approach.

First, the study entitled "Commodification of Poverty on Social Media" by Bela Fataya Azmi and Devi Wening Astari, published in the Journal of Semiotika, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2024, Communication Studies Program, Amikom University, Yogyakarta. This study aims to examine how poverty is commodified on social media, specifically through content on the Instagram accounts @hestyprw and @bella_saskya8. Using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, the researchers analyzed symbols representing poverty, such as low family economic conditions, simple or even damaged housing, and narratives of life full of hardship. The results show that the commodification of poverty on social media tends to be presented as an artificial performance. This content is created to attract attention, generate debate, and arouse audience curiosity. This demonstrates a significant difference between commodification practices on social media and conventional mass media.

Furthermore, a journal entitled "Representation of the Exploitation of Poverty in the Program 'Orang Peggiran' (Episode Sepenggal Kisah Anak Gembala di Trans 7)" by Rizky An Nahl, Rifma Ghulam, and Abdul Khohar, was published in *Dewantara: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Humaniora*, Vol. 3, No. 4, December 2024, Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Jakarta. This study analyzes the representation of poverty in an episode of the television program *Orang Peggiran* (The Marginal People), which highlights the life story of Juriyah's family. Using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, this study distinguishes between denotative and connotative meanings in the narrative and visuals presented. The research findings indicate that the show not only depicts the physical conditions of poverty but also creates connotative meanings regarding resilience and hope amidst limitations. Through the use of specific signs, this episode effectively conveys complex social realities and invites viewers to reflect on issues of social inequality and resilience in marginalized conditions.

This thesis, entitled "Pornography of Poverty and Women (Analysis of Women's Receptions to the Commodification of Poverty in Baim Paula's YouTube Content)" was researched by Nafa Aqla Islami, Communication Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, 2024.

This thesis examines the interdependence of media and audiences, contributing to their lives, benefiting each other, and playing a dynamic role, enabling audiences to become more active in receiving media information. Poverty in the media is framed as a regular spectacle that is continuously produced.

This research focuses on content on Baim Paula's YouTube account containing poverty pornography, and related to women's issues. The content is titled: Forced to Sell House and Land to Baim, 5-Month-Old Child with Stroke Abandoned by Family, and Paid 300x More for Merchandise But Rejected, This Mother Played a Prank, and It Turns Out to Be Her.

The following research uses an audience-interpretation approach to media texts by combining two analytical models: Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory and Abrams' Textual Relations. Hall's theory is used to examine how the process of meaning production occurs, both from the creator and recipient of the message, while Abrams' theory is used to analyze the relationship between the audience and the universe of text that influences the interpretation process.

This research shows that of the five female respondents who watched Baim Paula's YouTube content related to the commodification of poverty, three were in a negotiating

position, and two were in an oppositional position. No audience members were found to be in a dominant-hegemonic position, indicating a lack of full acceptance of the message. This low dominant position is influenced by media habits and how audiences interpret the poverty portrayed. Audiences generally perceive that the representation of poverty in such content does not fully reflect reality and is more manipulative.

Meanwhile, another study conducted by Gulam Raihan Akbar in his thesis entitled "Poverty Porn Framing of Poverty in the "Microphone Pelunas Utang" Program on Indosiar: A Framing Analysis by Robert N. Entman" (2023), Journalism Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, focused on the framing of poverty in reality television programs.

This study aimed to analyze how the practice of poverty porn—namely, the exploitation of poverty for entertainment and commercial gain—occurs in the "Microphone Pelunas Utang" program. Using Robert N. Entman's framing theory, the researcher revealed that the media selectively emphasized emotional aspects in the broadcast narrative, such as the suffering, tears, and struggles of the participants. This show, according to research, framed poverty as something worth selling through dramatic visuals, thereby garnering sympathy and increasing financial profits for the television station. Commodification was evident when the participants' grief was turned into a highly marketable commodity.

Data Sources

In this study, the data sources used were several poverty porn videos broadcast on the social media platforms YouTube and TikTok. These videos were selected as research samples because these two are the main platforms where poverty porn content is widely produced and consumed by large audiences. This data selection aimed to obtain a representative picture of the poverty porn phenomenon on social media, as well as the patterns of content production and reception by content creators and viewers.

Poverty Porn

Poverty porn can be defined as the presentation or portrayal of the poverty of an individual or group of people with the primary goal of garnering sympathy from a wider audience. Essentially, poverty porn is a phenomenon of human exploitation of poverty that is prevalent on social media, where poverty is used as a tool to trigger emotional reactions and public attention. Poverty is often used as a tool to increase the visibility of content and individuals, as well as to obtain direct or indirect financial gain (Apriani, 2022).

The presentation of poverty is used as a commodity that arouses public awareness, which is then exploited for both use and exchange value in the media realm. This exploitation of poverty can be carried out by various actors, from individuals and media entities to organizations that exploit the living conditions of those living in poverty for personal gain or benefit (Pramudya, 2022). According to Ju-won (2023), the practice of exploiting poverty can take various forms, including written content, photographs, and videos presented to attract public attention, encourage fundraising, and foster sympathy for beneficiaries.

Historically, the phenomenon of portraying poverty is not new and has been practiced in various contexts and media for years. For example, in 1984, the acts of musical artists participating in Live Aid or Band Aid were not considered poverty porn because the purpose of the concert was to raise funds to alleviate famine in Ethiopia, not for media commodification.

This action was realized through the theme song "Do They Know It's Christmas (Feed the World)," which inspired American musicians to form USA for Africa with the song "We Are The World" as a similar demonstration of solidarity. The inspiration for this movement also reached Indonesia, where musicians formed Suara Persaudaraan (Brotherhood Voice) with the song "Anak-Anak Terang" (Light Children), initiated by James F. Sundah, and several other artists who created the song "Kita Adalah Satu" (We Are One) by the group Bimbo.

By definition, poverty refers to the financial inability to meet a standard of living generally considered average in a particular community or region (Wardaya & Suprpti, 2018). The phenomenon of poverty porn on social media demonstrates the close relationship between the representation of poverty and the way the media presents and packages it as attention-grabbing content.

In Indonesia, several television programs explicitly depict images of pitiful faces and suffering, including war victims, depicting injured or dead children, to elicit public empathy. These visualizations are often intensively exposed to encourage donations, but often have underlying agendas, such as political or commercial interests. Research by Li & Yin (2022) shows that charity advertisements featuring a single beneficiary with a sad expression are more effective in increasing donations than those featuring multiple recipients simultaneously.

The negative impact of poverty porn practices is the loss of human dignity, especially for those who become the objects of the content, as it can lead to dehumanization and damage individual self-esteem (Formanowicz et al., 2018; Clough et al., 2023). This phenomenon also generates sympathy that is not balanced by true empathy; sympathy that only generates pity tends to create social distance between donors and beneficiaries, ultimately hindering constructive social change (Steimer, 2019).

Commodification

In business and social media, content presentation is not solely oriented toward conveying information or entertainment, but also primarily aimed at achieving financial gain. Social media, as part of the communications industry, must function as a commodity sold in a capitalist market. This concept of **commodification** means that anything that initially has use value, or intrinsic value for an individual or society, is transformed into something with exchange value, namely goods or services that can be traded for economic gain.

According to Mosco (1996), as cited by Lestari (2009: 265), there are three main concepts in understanding media from the perspective of capitalist institutions.

1. **Commodification**, namely the process by which mass media act as producers of goods ready for marketing. Media not only present content as entertainment or information, but also package it as a product with sales value. For example, a video on social media that attracts a large audience becomes a commercial asset that can be monetized through advertising and sponsorship.
2. **Spatialization**, namely the process of institutionally expanding the influence and power of media companies in the communications industry. In this sense, the media seeks to dominate broader spaces and markets, both locally, nationally, and globally. Spatialization shows how media expand the scope and reach of their business, thereby reaching a wider audience and generating greater profits.
3. **Structuration**, namely the process of forming social structures that emerge from interactions between individuals in society. Media, as an institution, also plays a role in shaping norms, values, and patterns of social interaction through the content it presents. Thus, the media is not only an economic actor but also a social agent that influences and reproduces social structures in society.

Furthermore, Mosco (1996: 145-161) divides commodification in communication into several specific forms.

1. **Content commodification**, the process of transforming messages, information, and data into meaningful, marketable products. Social media, videos, articles, or posts, which initially functioned as forms of expression or documentation, are packaged in such a way as to be attractive and marketable to both audiences and advertisers.
2. **Audience commodification**, the process by which media create or shape audiences that are then "sold" to advertisers. In other words, audiences are not just consumers of content but also become commercial objects. Advertisers pay media outlets for access to curated audiences, thus acting as intermediaries in this economic transaction.
3. **Cybernetic commodification**, which is divided into two aspects.
 - a. The first aspect is **intrinsic commodification**, where media use certain content or mechanisms to increase ratings or viewership, thereby attracting more advertisers and generating profits. For example, social media platform algorithms encourage viral content to increase audience size and longer viewing time.
 - b. The second aspect is **extensive commodification**, the process by which institutions such as government, media, and culture make access to information no longer free. In this system, information and services that were previously easily accessible are now treated as products that require payment. This creates a situation where people must pay for information, limiting access to it to those who can afford it.

Thus, the concept of commodification illustrates how social media and digital platforms have become not only communication platforms but also powerful business arenas within the logic of capitalism. All aspects, from content to audience, are processed to generate economic value. However, this process also carries complex social and cultural implications, particularly regarding how reality and identity are represented and how access to information is regulated in modern society.

Memetics

Content themed "poverty porn," or the exploitation of poverty, is now commonplace on various social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. This type of content is the result of imitation practices—where success in attracting large audiences and generating profits becomes a lure for other creators to follow suit. Heylighen and Chielens (2009:2) state that cultural elements transfer from one individual to another in a manner similar to the way genes or viruses work. Therefore, the process of cultural evolution can be understood through the same basic principles as those of biological evolution: reproduction, dissemination,

variation, and natural selection. This concept assumes the existence of units of cultural information equivalent to genes in biology.

These units of cultural information are known as memes—information patterns stored in a person's memory. Memes function analogously to genes, but develop in a different domain. Because of this difference, memes have become a separate subject of study within a new branch of science called memetics (Heylighen & Chielens, 2009:2). The term meme was first introduced by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1989), who defined it as a basic unit of cultural transmission or imitation. Meanwhile, according to Richard Brodie in *Virus of the Mind*, memes are considered the primary entity of information in the human mind, whose presence can influence various events and encourage the formation of new copies of the meme in the minds of others.

Regarding imitation as a mechanism for the spread of cultural memes, Wijayanto (2013:17) explains that in every imitative behavior, something is continuously transferred from one individual to another. This "something" is what Dawkins later called a meme. Furthermore, Dawkins (in Mahzar, 2012:57) describes memes as replicators, entities capable of reproducing themselves. The process of meme inheritance occurs through cultural learning or imitation. Meanwhile, according to Dennett (in Mahzar, 2006:61), memes have the properties of mind viruses. Dawkins also states (in Wijayanto, 2013:47) that memes in the human mind act like parasites, transforming humans into a medium for their own spread in a manner similar to how biological viruses piggyback on the genetic mechanisms of their host cells.

Agentic Habitus

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, the term agent refers to individuals who possess the ability to engage and adapt to the dynamics of social life. According to Ninditya (2009:301), agents tend to act mechanically due to the influence of habitus, a stable but not rigid system of tendencies. Ritzer (2003) adds that agents are individual actors within a social structure, although in some circumstances, the habitus as part of an agent may not be directly aligned with the external environment in which they reside.

For Bourdieu, humans always occupy a social arena where they struggle, give meaning to, and shape perceptions of reality, aided by various forms of capital possessed and influenced by their respective habitus. In Badriati's (2005:36) explanation, referring to Bourdieu (1977), habitus is understood as a system of long-term tendencies formed within an

individual throughout their life (durable), applicable across different social situations (transposable), and serving as the basis for consistent and objectively structured social practices.

From this understanding, it can be concluded that habitus is not always directly connected and is often separated from its dialectical relationship with the external environment. For example, the habit of imitating, influenced by memes as "mind viruses," is part of the habitus pattern as conceptualized by Bourdieu. Memes embedded in the human mind will encourage the emergence of imitative behavior or the reproduction of actions, previously formed through the individual's sensory experiences, combined with the capital they possess, such as economic, cultural, social, and political capital within a particular social domain.

In other words, the habitus of digital content creators, especially those who imitate viral content, can become a persistent pattern throughout their lives and is continuously reproduced through their activities on social media. Bourdieu identified several forms of capital inherent in an agent or actor, including cultural, symbolic, economic, and social capital. Each of these forms of capital determines an individual's social position and capacity to engage in social practices. In the context of digital content creators, an individual needs economic capital (such as money and technological devices), social capital (supportive networks and relationships), and cultural capital (adequate knowledge and insight into content and media). Habitus itself is the result of an individual's life journey, shaping how they think, act, and respond to their social environment.

Media Construction of Reality

In this regard, it is not only mass media that has the ability to reshape reality; social media also plays a similar role. The Social Construction of Reality Theory, proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, explains that social reality is formed through ongoing social processes, through the actions and interactions between individuals and groups. This process creates a reality that is subjectively perceived and interpreted in society.

This theory is rooted in the constructivist paradigm, which views reality as something socially constructed by individuals. This means that reality is not something fixed or objective, but rather shaped through human choice and free will, without being fully controlled by social structures or norms. In this context, individuals are seen as creators of social reality, actively and freely shaping meaning in their social lives (Luzar, 2015).

Through this freedom, individuals can now also construct new realities through social media. According to Mandilberg (in Nasrullah, 2018:11), social media is defined as a platform that enables collaboration between users to create content – known as user-generated content. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that individuals, both users and creators on social media, have the space to express their freedom through the creation of digital content, including **poverty porn**. They can reconstruct their own versions of social reality and share them with the public through digital platforms.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This research applies a qualitative descriptive approach to deeply explore the dynamics that occur between the phenomena of poverty pornography and memetics within the agents or actors of digital media content. The primary focus of this study is the process of commodification and the construction of reality manifested through video content on digital platforms, particularly social media. With this approach, researchers seek to understand the meanings, motives, and social underpinnings behind the practice of imitating content rife with representations of poverty. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it provides a holistic understanding of complex and dynamic social realities. This research focuses not on numbers or statistics, but rather on narratives, subjective meanings, and the interaction processes that shape the phenomenon.

As Creswell (2014:232) explains, qualitative research methods rely on data in the form of text and images. This means that in collecting data, researchers use sources such as visual documentation, interviews, observations, or video transcripts, which are then analyzed through specific, flexible and contextual stages. Each stage is tailored to the type of data and the theoretical framework employed. Another unique feature of this approach is the diversity of analytical designs, which allows researchers to develop a richer perspective on the phenomenon under study. In this case, the phenomenon of poverty pornography is not only understood as a visual display, but also as a cultural, symbolic, and economic product authorized by power relations in digital society.

In other words, this approach helps uncover layers of meaning hidden in the practices of content creators. Through this qualitative descriptive approach, it is hoped that this research can provide theoretical and practical contributions to understanding how memes, agent habitus, and content commodification strategies work in the digital media era. This research also opens up space to re-examine how social reality is shaped and displayed

through media, and the extent to which individual freedom to create specific narratives contributes to the reproduction of existing social structures.

Data Collection Techniques

This research relies on two types of data sources: primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from digital content videos featuring elements of poverty pornography, which were selectively selected as research samples. These videos serve as the primary object of analysis to understand how imitation practices, representations of poverty, and the construction of reality are portrayed by content creators on social media. Meanwhile, secondary data was collected from various readily available sources, such as news articles, social media posts, websites, and other digital media outlets discussing the poverty porn phenomenon. These sources served to strengthen the contextual analysis and provide a broader picture of how poverty-themed content is received and discussed in the digital public sphere.

Data Analysis Techniques

In analyzing the data, researchers began by watching and scrutinizing several videos featuring poverty porn. This process was carried out intensively to capture the visual meaning and narratives contained within them. Based on this observation, researchers then conducted a selection process, selecting videos that explicitly displayed mythical elements, particularly in the form of visualizations that emphasized poverty as the main attraction.

After selecting relevant videos, the content was collected and prepared as the primary analysis material. Researchers then presented these videos as study objects for further analysis. Each video was reviewed in the context of its social and visual representations, as well as its messages, to illustrate how the poverty porn phenomenon is shaped by creators on digital platforms.

The final step in the analysis process was to systematically outline the findings from the selected videos based on specific categories. The analysis was conducted by describing key elements of each video, such as imitation patterns, visual construction, and the underlying social context. With this approach, researchers were able to uncover deeper meanings regarding the motives, strategies, and social implications of poverty porn practices in digital media.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

Poverty porn-themed content created by creators on social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok has become quite popular and attracts a large audience. This phenomenon demonstrates that content depicting someone's misery or poverty actually attracts significant public attention. This raises a fundamental question: why content that should highlight the sad realities of life is so sought after and even enjoyed by viewers. In psychology, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept known as *Schadenfreude*, a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction that arises when someone witnesses the misfortune of others, including the suffering of those in poverty. This feeling is not merely curiosity but also a form of inner satisfaction that drives viewers to continue witnessing the suffering of others. Thus, *Schadenfreude* is one reason why poverty porn content attracts so many viewers, even though it may be considered morally controversial.

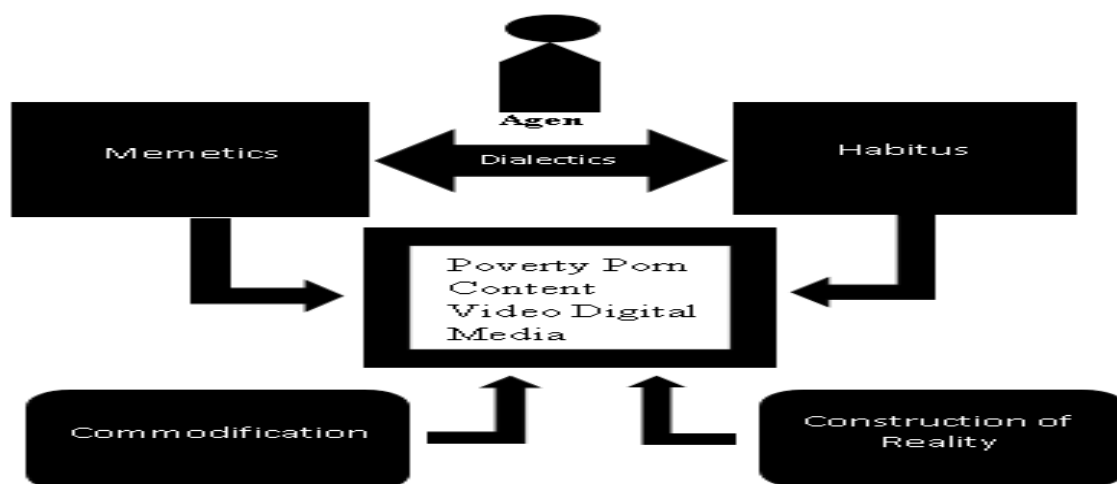
The Uses and Gratification theory developed by Elihu Katz provides a framework for further understanding of individual media selection behavior. This theory states that each person chooses media and content that aligns with their psychological needs and satisfaction. If poverty porn evokes feelings of *Schadenfreude*, viewers feel emotionally and spiritually fulfilled, and consciously or unconsciously choose such content. This situation then opens up opportunities for creators to continue producing this type of content, due to the stable audience base and the promise of profit. Previous research, such as that conducted by Rosnir in 2021, revealed that the practice of poverty porn has commodified the suffering of the poor. This commodification means that poverty is turned into a commodity that can be exploited for financial gain without regard for the social and ethical impacts. Whether consciously or unconsciously, this leads to demeaning treatment of poor groups, as the economic value of the content is prioritized over respect for the subjects depicted.

Furthermore, a 2017 study entitled "Poverty, porn, and the picture: exploring representations of exploitative media through the case of Oxfam" reinforces these findings by showing that media tend to receive more public attention and engagement when broadcasting poverty porn content compared to other, potentially more important and pressing social issues. These videos depicting misery are often presented explicitly without proper editing and sensitivity to the subject matter, potentially exacerbating the social stigma against the poor. The images depicted in this content often diminish the honor, self-respect, and dignity of the victims of poverty. The narratives and visuals presented are often demeaning and

exploitative, leaving no room for the respect or empathy that should be present in the presentation of content about poverty. While the intention to share and care for others is commendable, presentation methods that disregard humanistic aspects can actually diminish the value of humanity itself.

Thus, the poverty porn phenomenon is not simply a matter of aesthetics or content popularity, but also a matter of how social reality is constructed and commercialized in the digital realm. This demands awareness from creators, viewers, and social media platforms to be more critical and ethical in producing and consuming content related to poverty issues. Content constructed with human dignity in mind will better support positive social transformation than simply pursuing popularity and profit.

The Dialectic of Memetics and Agentic Habitus Through the Commodification and Construction of Reality in Poverty Porn Videos on Digital Media



From the explanation above, it is clear that there is a significant gap between aid providers (donors) and aid recipients in the practice of poverty porn. In this context, the practice of poverty porn is considered unethical and demeaning to human dignity (v.c.g, 2018). Aid providers often feel like heroes and readily exploit the suffering of the poor without considering the psychological and social impact on those depicted in the content. From a sociological perspective, particularly through the concept of habitus proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, an individual's habitus can be separate and not always aligned with the external world or surrounding social reality. For example, habitus related to imitation caused by "meme viruses" can emerge as repetitive patterns of habits or behaviors. Memes in an individual's mind work like replicators, reproducing behaviors and practices captured through sensory experience and stored in the habitus. This process is also influenced by the social,

cultural, political, and economic capital possessed by individuals within a given social context.

Content creators with economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital easily produce poverty porn content for financial gain. This practice continues through continuous imitation, where episodes from the lives of the poor are exploited to create engaging content. This demonstrates that the habitus of the creators and agents who replicate this content is stable and develops throughout their lives. Furthermore, the habitus of the imitators or agents (content creators) who produce poverty porn acts as a kind of replicator, encouraging the continuation of this practice. Furthermore, this condition also affects poor people who have never appeared in video content but are beginning to hope to participate in order to highlight their hardships and gain benefits or public attention.

Regarding the capital inherent in agents, Bourdieu divides capital into several types: cultural capital, symbolic capital, economic capital, and social capital. Each of these capitals influences a person's social class position and capacity to engage in social practices, including creating digital content. To produce video content, an agent or content creator must possess economic capital in the form of money, equipment, and facilities; social capital in the form of social networks that support their class; and cultural capital, which includes knowledge and skills in content processing. Meanwhile, a person's habitus is the result of life experiences that form the basis for acting and interacting in a social environment.

The habitus of a content creator who consistently produces poverty porn-themed videos on platforms like YouTube and TikTok is a relatively new phenomenon and was not widely recognized before the Covid-19 pandemic. The actions of content creators as social agents are heavily influenced by the social arena in which they operate and the capital they possess, all of which play a role in shaping their habitus. In other words, the habits and behavioral patterns of these creators are the result of the internalization of experiences and social interactions that occur within a specific context.

This habitus formation process also involves the meme mechanism, where ideas or behavioral patterns are imitated and spread from one individual to another. In this case, habitus and memes operate simultaneously within the content creator, forming a structure of habits and imitative actions that emerge from observations of the environment and the behavior of others. Although habitus is generally durable, it can still change along with

fluctuations in social conditions and new experiences the creator encounters throughout their life.

Content creators continually produce poverty porn content because it has proven to attract a significant number of viewers and subscribers, even reaching millions. This phenomenon has been exploited as a commodity that generates capital, particularly from advertising revenue. A clear example is channels like Baim Paula and Willie Salimn's successful content with this theme. This success encourages creators to continue to imitate and produce similar content, albeit with different subjects or objects in each episode, resulting in high engagement in the form of subscribers and likes.

From a broader perspective, the viewers or audiences who watch this content are no longer merely passive consumers but have become valuable commodities. They become targets within the media market mechanism, where content producers and advertisers act as actors marketing their products to audiences. Thus, the media industry focuses not only on producing text and content but also on transforming audiences into commodities that can be sold to advertisers, making economic interests a primary driver behind the production of such content.

This phenomenon demonstrates how social media and its agents actively exploit social and technological dynamics to create economic value from interaction and content consumption. Here, poverty porn content is not simply a social representation, but also a commercial product driven by capitalist market logic that exploits habitus and memes as mechanisms of cultural and economic reproduction.

In addition to content creators, new media and social media users have unconsciously acted as "workers" for these platform owners. They voluntarily fill digital spaces with various types of content—from text and images to audio and video—which then flood social media platforms. With this massive content contribution from users, platform owners no longer need to rely on dedicated employees to produce content. These users are not only productive in producing content but also provide valuable capital that can be traded to advertising companies seeking to reach large and engaged audiences (Nugroho, 2023: 78-84).

In the realm of photography, there is a complex relationship between power and reality, as well as between cameramen and subjects. Susan Sontag, in her essay "On Photography," cited by Melissa Anne Mascovich in the article "Poverty, Porn, and the Picture: Exploring Representations of Exploitative Media Through the Case of Oxfam," explains that the camera

functions as a tool that objectifies the individual subject of the photograph. When the subject is from a marginalized or excluded group, the photograph can then be used to trigger an emotional response, particularly from donors, third parties, or policymakers. From the perspective of the photographer or content creator, the more severe the suffering captured, the greater the potential for financial gain.

This phenomenon can also be seen in the case highlighted in the video content in the Introduction subheading, as quoted in a Kompas.tv article by Fiqih Rahmawati. Nenek Sari, a resident of Setanggor Village in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, admitted that the mud bath she performed live on Sultan Intan's TikTok account was intended to earn easier income than her primary job as a farmer. In a short time, after just five live mud baths, Nenek Sari and the TikTok account owner managed to reap a financial profit of 18 million rupiah, which was then split 50/50. This case demonstrates how content that exploits everyday life can become a significant source of income, while also demonstrating a new economic dynamic in the social media realm.

To date, many content creators on TikTok still exploit the plight of the poor as material for their content, seeking financial gain by inciting sympathy from their viewers. An example is the account @nenek.kakek, which actively broadcasts live with the caption "Sultan Mapir Yu" displayed on the screen, as seen in the previous screenshot.

Furthermore, the account @pantiasuhansicb.2014, a member of the Sinar Indah Cahaya Bersama Orphanage, broadcasts live with the caption "Help tap, share & support good people," and includes a gift feature in the right corner of the screen, allowing viewers to donate directly.

These poverty porn video creators attempt to reconstruct or reconstruct the reality of poverty by packaging it as a disguised commodity. The goal is to arouse sympathy and emotion in viewers, thus encouraging them to donate. On the other hand, social media platforms like YouTube also profit by advertising their products in content that attracts a large audience. Thus, there is synergy between poverty content as an emotional commodity and the commercial interests of digital platforms.

V. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of poverty porn, which frequently appears on social media, is the result of a dialectical interaction between memetics and habitus, held by agents, in this case

content creators, when they produce videos on platforms like YouTube and TikTok. This can be seen in the repeated and consistent production of poverty porn videos by these creators.

Videos depicting poor people have managed to attract the attention of numerous viewers and have subsequently transformed into commodities with economic value. In other words, content that initially merely depicted poverty has transformed into a product that can be exchanged in the digital marketplace, shifting from use value to exchange value.

All social events in society, including the existence of the poor, are then reconstructed by social media as realities presented for public consumption. This construction of reality presents spectacles that can evoke sympathy and emotion in viewers, thus eliciting acts of concern in the form of donations or assistance from viewers. Thus, poverty is not only a social issue but also a media commodity that drives social and economic interaction in the digital realm.

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