

Criticism and Reflection on Myopic Behaviors in Data-Driven Online Content Production

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Abstract—Driven by platform capitalism and the digital economy, the “traffic first” data logic has reshaped the ecology of online content production, leading to an endless stream of myopic behaviors that unilaterally pursue immediate benefits. This paper analyzes the drivers of such behaviors from three perspectives: capital logic, technological algorithms, and data driven evaluation systems. Using representative cases, it systematically elaborates on the multiple harms these behaviors inflict on authenticity, professionalism, and social welfare. Through critical reflection and practical exploration, this study provides theoretical reference and practical guidance for building a rational, healthy, and sustainable online content ecosystem. The article is divided into five parts: the first part examines the formation drivers of myopic behaviors; the second part discusses their real world harms; the third part offers a critical reflection on the underlying contradictions; the fourth part proposes countermeasures including value oriented evaluation and multi stakeholder governance; and finally, the conclusion emphasizes that data should serve content value rather than replace it, calling for a more humanistic and long term logic of content production.

Keywords— Digital capitalism; content production; myopic behaviors.

Content was once the undisputed cornerstone of media competition. In the era of platform capitalism, however, data—particularly traffic metrics—has become the dominant guide for online content production, profoundly shaping how content is created and disseminated. Under this data-driven regime, a series of short-sighted, profit-chasing behaviors have emerged. These behaviors not only constrain the sustainable development of the content industry but also pose potential threats to socio-cultural ecology and public spiritual life. Therefore, this paper attempts a systematic critique and reflection on data-driven myopic behaviors in online content production, aiming to provide a reference for building a more rational content ecosystem.

I. DRIVERS OF MYOPIC BEHAVIORS IN ONLINE CONTENT PRODUCTION

(1) Capital's Pursuit of Profit as the Fundamental Driver

Capital's relentless drive for the unlimited proliferation of data and traffic is the root cause of myopic behaviors. Both platform organizations and individual producers aim to attract users, increase engagement, and convert traffic into economic value. In the digital economy, traffic has become a key instrument for platform capitalists to generate revenue. The platform economy represents a new form of “data capitalism.”

As Srnicek (2018) reveals in Platform Capitalism, platforms systematically extract and monopolize data by intermediating social life, turning data into capital and thereby building new profit foundations.[2] Under this mechanism, all user activities—content consumption, social interaction, and even daily routines—are transformed into quantifiable, tradable data commodities. Platform capital then extracts substantial surplus value by possessing and operating these data. Consequently, online content production is dragged into an intense battle for traffic. The core task of producers shifts from pursuing depth and aesthetic value to efficiently capturing user attention—increasing page views, clicks, likes, and comments—to complete the precarious leap from “attention” to “economic value.”

(2) Algorithmic Discipline as an External Driver

Algorithmic mechanisms provide new means for capital to expand its power, while capital logic endows algorithms with a hegemonic dimension: “algorithm is rule, and rule is domination” (Deng, 2023).[3] Algorithms thus achieve a new form of control over content production. Although the democratization of media access allows many individual creators to participate in cultural production, these creators cannot escape the algorithmic rules and logic established by platforms. Recommendation algorithms act as invisible editors, determining which content is presented and disseminated based on user profiles and behavioral predictions. Their operational logic is deeply rooted in attention economy theory: in an information-overloaded space, user attention is scarce, and people tend to allocate it to novel stimuli (Feng, Liu, & Wang, 2023).[4] To gain algorithmic preference, producers must comply with its implicit preferences, striving to create novelty—manifested in sensational headlines, extreme viewpoints, and formulaic content formats. What appears as free creation is, in essence, a choreographed dance under the algorithm's baton. As a result, producers internalize traffic and data metrics as their core goal, and their creative philosophy shifts from “what I want to express” to “what algorithms and users want to see.” Technological algorithms thus construct a fine-grained data cage that systematically disciplines the direction and form of content production.

(3) Data Dominance as the Institutional Root

Within the platform's performance framework, the authority to judge content value is monopolized by a highly

simplified set of data metrics. An evaluation system that appears fair but in reality “sees only data, not content” enables capital to manipulate from behind the scenes (Hao, 2024).^[5] However, this apparent fairness is merely a facade; its essence is the precise control of capital will through technological forms. Quantitative indicators such as click-through rates, completion rates, and interaction metrics—with their surface objectivity and immediacy—form a common language for content evaluation. Creators no longer dedicate themselves to meaning-making and cultural innovation; instead, they become optimizers of data metrics, and content production falls into a systemic cult of data. When value is defined and adjudicated by such a simplified data system, content production exhibits a clear bias: optimizing data metrics above all else. This orientation acts as a filter that inherently excludes content that resists rapid quantification. Depth of thought, cultural heritage, and artistic innovation—elements that nourish the human spirit—are forced to take a back seat to cold numbers. Over time, creation gradually transforms from a meaningful cultural practice into a grand revelry centered on data fabrication. If “data” replaces “value” as the fundamental criterion, content production becomes disconnected from its socio-cultural functions and inevitably falls into a self-alienating, short-sighted cycle.

II. REAL-WORLD HARMS OF MYOPIC BEHAVIORS IN ONLINE CONTENT PRODUCTION

Data-driven myopic behaviors, which sacrifice long-term development for short-term traffic gains, cause harm across multiple dimensions of online content production. From the authenticity of information dissemination to the professionalism of content creation and the value of social welfare, these behaviors severely disrupt the order of the content industry and negatively impact public interests and cultural development.

(1) Disrupting the Information Ecosystem and Draining Public Trust

Social media is a thoroughly commercial product, steeped in capital from its inception. “Traffic” has become a key indicator for self-media to realize profits (Luo, 2022).^[6] In the fierce competition for traffic, the journalistic principle of authenticity gives way to dramatic narratives that instantly capture attention. A typical case is the story fabricated by the influencer “Thurman Cat’s Cup” (Thurman Mao Yibei) about “finding a primary school student’s homework in Paris.” To create a so-called “cross-border positive energy” viral story, the planner completely fabricated the details. This act constituted public deception. It not only consumes a large amount of public attention resources, disrupts online order, and exacerbates information complexity, but also severely drains social credibility. When users are repeatedly deceived by carefully crafted lies, the result is not just a crisis of trust in a specific influencer but a generalized suspicion toward the entire online content ecosystem: “Is the next seemingly real content also fabricated?” The spread of such generalized suspicion fundamentally undermines the trust foundation of social interaction and public discourse. The

permanent ban of Thurman Cat’s Cup’s account is a necessary legal response to bottom-line violations, confirming that any myopic behavior attempting to trade fabricated facts for traffic will ultimately be punished by backlash and institutional penalties.

(2) Infringing on Intellectual Property and Stifling Originality

The data orientation encourages a fast-food consumption model, which in turn fosters traffic shortcuts at the expense of intellectual property. The copyright controversy surrounding the series “Watch a Movie in X Minutes” by Gu Amo, an internet celebrity from the Taiwan region of China, vividly illustrates this problem. As academic analysis has pointed out, the core issue is the use of pirated resources for derivative works and commercial gain, which directly infringes on the legitimate rights of copyright holders and constitutes a substitute consumption of the original work’s market value (Lin & Lin, 2022).^[7] The basic logic of such content production is to treat others’ original works as free “content mines,” quickly producing easily spread and consumed “content fast food” through simple editing, splicing, and subjective commentary. In the short term, creators reap significant traffic and commercial benefits through such free-riding. In the long run, however, this business model is inherently fragile and unsustainable. It directly infringes on copyright holders’ rights, inevitably triggering strong legal countermeasures. Moreover, it stifles the motivation for originality. If appropriation is more efficient at generating profits than painstaking original creation, how many will be willing to invest time and energy in deep creation? The entire content ecosystem will inevitably slide into a vortex of homogenization and superficiality, and cultural innovation will dry up. The Gu Amo case ended in a settlement, but its warning is profound: any success built on infringement is a castle in the air.

(3) Consuming Social Empathy and Squeezing Public Welfare Space

The most egregious myopic behavior is building a traffic business on the consumption of the most precious human emotions and trust. Online live streaming has long evolved beyond pure entertainment into a new media form with both entertainment and cognitive functions (Zhang, 2020).^[8] Precisely because of its unique sense of immediacy and interactivity, live streaming holds great potential in scenarios emphasizing authenticity and trust, such as “helping farmers” initiatives. However, under the distorted data orientation, its content production logic has become alienated. In short videos, we see a girl with a tragic background living resiliently, but behind the touching story is a pre-written script. The “farm-fresh” agricultural products from Daliangshan sold under the banner of “helping farmers” are actually cheaply purchased from wholesale markets. Driven by the pursuit of sales data and tipping revenue, some organizations meticulously fabricate simple, poor personas and create tragic stories, turning the noble act of public welfare into a naked emotional scam. When “poverty” becomes a performed

spectacle and “suffering” is scripted, the social cognitive system’s ability to identify and respond to real difficulties is severely disrupted. The resulting crisis of trust not only affects the effectiveness of public welfare communication but may also squeeze out the voice space for groups truly in need. Although such hidden social costs are difficult to quantify, they have profound and lasting negative impacts. Traffic monetization models should not be built on the systematic consumption of social goodwill and public welfare values.

III. CRITICAL REFLECTION ON MYOPIC BEHAVIORS IN ONLINE CONTENT PRODUCTION

Research on data-driven myopic behaviors must go beyond cause analysis and harm description. Critical reflection is needed to uncover the deep essence behind these behaviors and analyze the multiple logical contradictions they contain, so as to understand the core problems at their root and lay the foundation for subsequent solutions. The essence of these myopic behaviors is the suppression of content value rationality by data instrumental rationality, and the erosion of the socio-cultural functions of online content production by capital’s profit-seeking logic under platform capitalism. Behind this lie three core contradictions: short-term traffic gains vs. long-term industrial development; technological tool attributes vs. humanistic value pursuits; and platform capital interests vs. social public interests. The continuous intensification of these contradictions has trapped online content production in a development dilemma of data-only doctrine.

(1) *Instrumental Rationality Suppressing Value Rationality*

From a philosophical and sociological perspective, the core essence of data-driven myopic behaviors is the absolute suppression of the value rationality of online content production by data instrumental rationality. Meanwhile, capital’s profit-seeking logic under platform capitalism continuously erodes the socio-cultural functions that online content production should bear, reducing content creation to a tool for capital realization and stripping it of its spiritual core and social value. Data, as an important production factor in the digital age, inherently possesses instrumental attributes. Applying data to online content production aims to accurately match content supply with user demand, improve dissemination efficiency, and enhance user experience—a reasonable manifestation of data instrumental rationality. However, under the profit-seeking logic of platform capitalism, data’s instrumental attributes are infinitely amplified, data metrics become the sole standard for measuring content value, and data instrumental rationality gradually transcends and suppresses value rationality. The value rationality of online content production should be embodied in depth of thought, cultural connotation, aesthetic value, social significance, and its role in nourishing public spiritual life, inheriting and innovating culture, and engaging with public issues. But under the single data logic of “traffic first,” these value-rational pursuits are marginalized, and the sole goal becomes optimizing data metrics to achieve traffic monetization. At the same time, capital’s profit-seeking logic

continuously undermines the socio-cultural functions of online content production. Online content production is not only a commercial activity but also a cultural practice, carrying important social functions such as disseminating information, transmitting culture, guiding public opinion, and building social consensus. Yet driven by capital’s core logic, platforms and content producers focus only on commercial value, ignoring socio-cultural value: to attract traffic, they do not hesitate to spread false information and extreme viewpoints, disrupting information dissemination and public discourse; to cater to low tastes, they produce vulgar and kitsch content, corrupting socio-cultural norms; to achieve quick monetization, they consume social goodwill and damage the public welfare ecosystem, harming public interests. The socio-cultural functions of online content production are thus continuously eroded by profit-seeking, and content creation becomes a purely commercial activity—this is the essence of data-driven myopic behaviors.

(2) *Short-term Gains vs. Long-term Development*

The emergence of data-driven myopic behaviors stems from content producers’ excessive pursuit of short-term traffic gains, which conflicts sharply with the long-term sustainable development of the online content industry. This is the first core contradiction behind myopic behaviors. The immediacy and certainty of short-term traffic gains contrast starkly with the lag and uncertainty of long-term industrial development. Under the dual pressures of profit-seeking capital and algorithmic discipline, content producers often choose to sacrifice long-term development for short-term traffic and commercial benefits. From the perspective of individual producers and platforms, short-term traffic gains have direct appeal. By fabricating dramatic stories, producing fast-food content, and consuming social empathy, they can quickly increase follower counts and content reach, achieving monetization through ads, product placement, and tips. This immediate satisfaction meets producers’ economic needs and platforms’ performance requirements. In contrast, the long-term development of the online content industry requires producers to invest significant time, energy, and resources in deep original creation, building quality content brands, and cultivating stable user groups. This process has obvious lag and uncertain returns. In fierce industry competition, some producers may fail to receive corresponding returns due to excessive upfront investment. Most content producers and platforms prioritize short-term traffic gains, neglecting the importance of long-term industrial development. However, from an overall industry perspective, this excessive pursuit of short-term gains ultimately harms the long-term development of the entire industry: when cyberspace is flooded with false, vulgar, and infringing content, the public develops a general crisis of trust and aesthetic fatigue, reducing their willingness to consume online content; when the industry falls into homogeneous involution, originality is stifled, and cultural innovation dries up, the industry loses its core development momentum, struggling to produce high-quality content with intellectual, artistic, and appreciative value, eventually leading to stagnation. The value conflict between short-term traffic

gains and long-term industrial development is continuously intensified under the data orientation, becoming a major internal cause of myopic behaviors.

(3) Cultivating Rational Producers and Consumers

Ultimately, the last line of defense for a healthy content ecosystem lies in people with critical and reflective abilities. Therefore, comprehensively improving society's overall media literacy is a fundamental solution. For content producers, the core of literacy education lies in cultivating professional ethics and a long-term vision, making them deeply realize that any traffic obtained at the expense of authenticity, creativity, and goodwill will be short-lived and will completely destroy the credibility upon which they depend. Furthermore, by calling for and reconstructing the subjectivity of content creators at the aesthetic level, excellent content production can regain fresh vitality in both discourse and practice, making content creation a deliberate and thoughtful endeavor. Only then can online content producers shift their creative focus from chasing quantitative indicators like data and traffic back to adhering to self-expression and subjectivity. For the general user, it is necessary to cultivate critical consumption skills, learning to identify the motives and strategies behind information. They should actively follow, like, and share quality content, exercising their "content voting rights." When rational producers and consumers become the majority, a healthy content ecosystem capable of self-purification and self-optimization will have its most solid social foundation.

IV. COUNTERMEASURES FOR MYOPIC BEHAVIORS IN ONLINE CONTENT PRODUCTION

Faced with the severe challenges posed by data-driven myopic behaviors and the multiple deep-seated contradictions behind them, we cannot stop at critical reflection but must explore practical, targeted countermeasures. Breaking the myopic dilemma requires breaking the single "traffic-only" logic and starting from three core aspects: reconstructing the value evaluation system, coordinating multi-stakeholder governance, and cultivating the literacy of production and consumption subjects. This will rebuild the ecology of online content production, return content creation to its value origin, and achieve a balanced development between short-term benefits and long-term development, technological tools and humanistic values, and capital interests and social public interests.

(1) From Traffic-first to Value-first

The key to eliminating myopic behaviors is to break the single value criterion of "traffic-only." Platforms and industry organizations should work together to build a diversified content evaluation system that comprehensively considers social benefits, cultural connotation, artistic innovation, and user satisfaction. In algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, a key parameter of "value weighting" can be skillfully incorporated. Quality content such as authoritative in-depth reports, original artistic works with unique craftsmanship, and rigorous professional science communication should receive higher recommendation weights and long-term traffic support.

This can reverse the abnormal market phenomenon of "bad money driving out good" at the institutional level, allowing content that carries public value and has positive social significance to gain exposure commensurate with its importance and truly reach the public. In addition, a sound creator credit file system should be established, incorporating factors such as originality, compliance, and social reputation into the evaluation of creators. Credit should become the most valuable intangible asset for creators, guiding content producers to abandon myopic practices of chasing data trends and instead focus on building brand value with lasting vitality.

(2) Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities to Form Synergistic Governance

Building a clean cyberspace requires a synergistic governance structure involving platforms, government, and society. Platform enterprises must abandon the passive stance of "technological neutrality" and effectively fulfill their responsibilities in content review, algorithm governance, copyright protection, and consumer rights protection. They should attach great importance to the seriousness and authenticity of content creation. For malignant incidents such as "fake charity" live streams, platforms should implement a dual-review mechanism for streamer personas and product sources to prevent problems before they occur. Government departments need to shift their regulatory model from "ex-post punishment" to "ex-ante warning and in-process intervention," issuing more targeted operational norms to clarify authenticity requirements and legal responsibilities. On this basis, a convenient reporting and feedback mechanism with rewards can be established, mobilizing society as a whole to supervise, forming an all-encompassing social supervision network, so that myopic behaviors in content production have nowhere to hide under multi-stakeholder governance.

(3) Cultivating Rational Producers and Consumers

[As discussed in section 3 (3), the same principle applies to countermeasures.] Ultimately, the last line of defense for a healthy content ecosystem lies in people with critical and reflective abilities. Therefore, comprehensively improving society's overall media literacy is a fundamental solution. For content producers, the core of literacy education lies in cultivating professional ethics and a long-term vision, making them deeply realize that any traffic obtained at the expense of authenticity, creativity, and goodwill will be short-lived and will completely destroy the credibility upon which they depend. Furthermore, by calling for and reconstructing the subjectivity of content creators at the aesthetic level, excellent content production can regain fresh vitality in both discourse and practice, making content creation a deliberate and thoughtful endeavor. Only then can online content producers shift their creative focus from chasing quantitative indicators like data and traffic back to adhering to self-expression and subjectivity. For the general user, it is necessary to cultivate critical consumption skills, learning to identify the motives and strategies behind information. They should actively follow, like, and share quality content, exercising their "cultural voting rights." When rational

producers and consumers become the majority, a healthy content ecosystem capable of self-purification and self-optimization will have its most solid social foundation.

V. CONCLUSION

Data, as a valuable production factor in the digital age, is not inherently guilty. The scientific and rational application of data to online content production is intended to more accurately connect content supply and demand, improve dissemination efficiency, and optimize user experience, injecting new momentum into the development of the online content industry. However, under the profit-seeking logic of platform capitalism, platform algorithms that carry capital's will have become the dominant force in allocating online information resources. Data's instrumental attributes are infinitely amplified, and data metrics become the sole standard for measuring the value of online content. Under this single data orientation, the selection and delivery of cultural content follow a fixed algorithmic path. The living space of diverse cultural forms that should be vibrant is gradually squeezed, and online content production increasingly tends toward homogenization and superficiality. When data, in collusion with capital and technology, becomes the sole and exclusive purpose of online content production, its instrumental rationality overpowers value rationality, profit-seeking logic dissolves socio-cultural functions, and myopic behaviors proliferate. Our critique of data-driven myopic behaviors is not meant to completely deny the important role of data and technology in online content production, but rather to reflect

on the alienation of data and technology and to call for a more humanistic and far-sighted logic of online content production.

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