
Labouring on Digital Sexual Spaces: Experiences of South African OnlyFans Creators

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Abstract

This article concerns itself with generating a means of understanding platform-mediated work in South Africa through how it is organized on OnlyFans. It uses interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore how black South African youth are using digital platforms to negotiate their labour force participation in a country that has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world. It provides gendered, raced, and classed experiences of labouring in platform or gig economies. The findings highlight the work done to create content and the social media integration that goes into building a following, marketing content, cultivating relationships with subscribers, and managing online presence across social media platforms. This interrelated process requires both entrepreneurial acumen and digital literacy because platform or gig economies shift managerial responsibilities of developing performance areas to the workers. The paper contrasts the promise of autonomy and empowerment with the realities of competition and algorithmic control by highlighting the importance of reputation management, the complexities of trust, and the persistent need to balance platform work with other jobs and domestic responsibilities. Finally, the article considers the potential for delayed gratification and residual income generation on OnlyFans. The possibility of the revenue payable to creators accumulating beyond initial distribution challenges the overarching theme of income insecurity within platforms because the services platform labourers offer can have more than one utility value when happenstance their labouring circulates beyond the point of *initial* sale to the established audience, further drawing in new audiences which consume the labouring in perpetuity and accruing residuals which can enrich platform labourers in an uncertain future date.

Keywords: Platform Mediated Work, OnlyFans, Gig Economy, Digital Sexual Spaces, South Africa

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