Maneggio
E-ISSN : 3032-7652
https://nawalaeducation.com/index.php/MJ/index
Vol.2.No.5 October 2025
DOI : https://doi.org/10.62872/9q0zhk11

Creator Economy as a New Trend: Business Management Implications in the Digital Influencer Era

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Input : August 29, 2025
Revised : September 30, 2025
Accepted: October 13, 2025
Published : October 28, 2025

ABSTRACT

The creator economy phenomenon marks a shift in the economic paradigm from material production to symbolic production oriented toward attention, creativity, and social legitimacy. This study aims to analyze the implications for business management in the context of the development of the creator economy and the role of digital influencers as key actors in this ecosystem. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study explores the experiences, strategies, and dynamics of relationships between creators, brands, and digital platforms through in-depth interviews and participant observation. The results show that economic value is now built through symbolic interactions, identity performativity, and emotional collaboration between creators and audiences. Meanwhile, business management structures are transforming toward a more flexible, participatory, and social network-based collaborative model. However, dependence on platform algorithms creates new power asymmetries and ethical challenges for the sustainability of the creator economy. Therefore, business management in the digital era needs to develop strategies oriented not only toward economic efficiency but also toward digital ethics, transparency, and social sustainability. These findings confirm that the creator economy is a new form of participatory capitalism that demands the integration of technological logic, cultural values, and managerial responsibility.

Keywords: Business Collaboration, Creator Economy, Digital Management

INTRODUCTION

The digital economy has marked a radical shift in the concept of value, previously based on physical production and linear distribution, toward symbolic production based on the collective attention of online communities. This shift has created a new configuration in which the attention economy has become the primary competitive arena between individuals, brands, and technology platforms vying for social legitimacy. Content creators, as central actors, play a hybrid role between producers, communicators, and symbolic entrepreneurs, combining creativity with algorithmic calculation. Value is no longer defined by material scarcity, but rather by the resonance of messages with global audiences formed through digital social networks. This phenomenon challenges classic economic assumptions about productivity and ownership, as value now stems from engagement and interaction, rather than from ownership of tangible assets. Consequently, market dynamics have become fluid, with the boundaries between consumption and production increasingly blurred, giving rise to new forms of economic participation, namely prosumerism (Maulana & Salsabila, 2020). This shift demands an adaptive managerial approach to digital logic that places greater emphasis on creativity, speed, and the ability to adapt to changing algorithms. Therefore, the creator economy is not only a cultural phenomenon, but also a new mechanism of value production that changes the theoretical foundations of modern business management.

Companies operating under the digital economy are facing disruption to previously hierarchical and standardized managerial structures. Conventional strategies focused on internal efficiency and vertical control are losing their relevance as collaboration with creators demands flexibility, spontaneity, and the negotiation of public identities. Project-based work models and short-term collaborations are replacing traditional employment contracts, demanding organizations' ability to adapt to rapidly changing attention cycles. The success of a business campaign is now determined more by perceived authenticity than by product quality alone, signaling a shift in value from production to representation (Putri et al., 2025). However, the reliance on creators' personal brands creates a tension between brand control and the autonomy of individuals who present themselves as narrative entities. This situation creates a new managerial dilemma: how to manage economic relations based on performativity and public emotion without losing corporate integrity. This shift suggests that modern management must understand digital meaning structures as strategic resources no less important than financial capital. Consequently, management theory needs to integrate symbolic and cultural dimensions into business decision-making to remain relevant amidst the transformation of the digital economy.

The emergence of the creator economy is also inextricably linked to the dominance of algorithms that govern the logic of content distribution and public attention. Digital platforms function simultaneously as markets, regulators, and mediators, determining who is visible and who is excluded from the digital public sphere (Izzati & Fasa, 2025). While the common narrative glorifies the democratization of access, algorithmic structures actually create a new hierarchy of visibility dependent on adherence to performance metrics. Creators and companies participating in this ecosystem are subject to algorithmic governance that demands continuous adaptation to changing technological parameters. This uncertainty gives rise to a form of asymmetrical structural dependency, where platforms retain complete control over the digital economy's infrastructure. The tension between creative freedom and algorithmic control becomes a key battleground for the sustainability of the creator economy (Zahra et al., 2025). Therefore, business management strategies need to consider the systemic risks stemming from algorithmic volatility as a determining variable in the stability of the digital economy. This reality emphasizes that the success of the creator economy is not solely the result of individual creativity but also a product of institutional design controlled by global technology corporations.

The bond between creators and platforms gives rise to a new form of relational capitalism, where social and symbolic capital become highly valued economic instruments. Interactions between users and creators are not only communicative but also economic, as each engagement is translated into market value through platform monetization mechanisms (Haraha et al., 2025). This pattern demonstrates that economic relationships in the digital era rely on affective production, where emotions become a commodity to be measured and traded. Companies that understand this mechanism are able to transform interactions into experience-based loyalty strategies, rather than mere transactions. However, exploiting this emotional dimension poses ethical risks, such as manipulating public perception and creating psychological dependency on content. Therefore, business management in the creator era must develop an approach that balances economic profit with social responsibility to audiences. This transformation demonstrates that success in the creator economy requires a deep understanding of digital consumer psychology and the dynamics of virtual social networks (Kolo, 2024). Therefore, the integration of marketing strategy, digital ethics, and technology is a key prerequisite for business sustainability.

Fundamental shifts in the logic of value production also challenge traditional definitions of work and productivity. Content creators operate in a work ecosystem that blurs the lines between personal and professional time, resulting in a culturally celebrated yet economically vulnerable "always-on" labor phenomenon. The absence of formal employment protections and reliance on algorithms place the creator profession at the intersection of freedom and uncertainty. This paradox creates an economic landscape that gives rise to a new class of digital workers driven by intrinsic motivation but bound by the logic of platform capitalism. From a management perspective, this situation demands a rethinking of the concepts of work well-being, productivity, and leadership in non-traditional contexts. Companies working with creators need to understand the affective and social dynamics underlying their motivations in order to build equitable collaborative relationships. This demonstrates that the creator economy is not just a matter of marketing strategy, but also a matter of new social structures and work ethics. Thus, the issue of social sustainability has become a crucial dimension in digital business management.

The dynamics of interactions between brands, creators, and audiences create a multidirectional and non-linear communication ecosystem. Audiences are no longer passive recipients, but active participants who contribute to the symbolic value of a product or digital identity. Real-time feedback mechanisms through comments, likes, and shares create a constantly evolving circulation of meaning that is difficult for management to fully control. This phenomenon demands the ability of organizations to understand public narratives as strategic variables that determine brand reputation. Every small interaction in the digital space can change the collective perception of a business entity, highlighting the importance of narrative literacy and cultural sensitivity in decision-making (Qiu, 2025). Therefore, corporate communication strategies must shift from a top-down approach to a participatory one that positions audiences as partners in value creation. This transformation creates a new form of reputation management based on transparency, dialogue, and trust. Ultimately, competitive advantage in the digital era is determined not only by products, but by the ability to interpret and manage the meanings that live in online social spaces.

This shift also demands a paradigm shift in education and human resource development. Success in the creator economy requires multidimensional competencies that combine digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and narrative thinking. Human resources trained in an interdisciplinary approach are able to navigate the complex relationships between technology, culture, and economics that underpin the creator ecosystem. Companies that fail to anticipate this need will be left behind, trapped within narrow, technocratic competency structures. This adaptation also requires a reformulation of leadership models that no longer center on control, but rather on empowerment and cross-sector collaboration. Thus, the development of creative capabilities becomes a strategic asset that determines an organization's long-term competitiveness in the digital realm. This shift in mindset reinforces the view that the creator economy is not merely a trend, but rather a transition to a new form of capitalism based on creativity and social networks. This competency transformation marks the emergence of an era in which creativity becomes the primary capital in the reproduction of economic value.

The accumulation of all these dynamics suggests that the creator economy represents the most recent evolution of capitalism, striving to adapt to the logic of networks, symbols, and affection (Ingrassia et al., 2022). This shift not only transforms the way businesses are run but also challenges the epistemological foundations of management science itself. While efficiency and rationality were previously the primary principles, flexibility, authenticity, and adaptability are now the measures of success. The relationship between companies, creators, and platforms forms a new trichotomy of economic power that demands a balance between innovation and regulation. The global connectivity created by digital platforms means that business management is no longer simply about managing resources but also about interpreting constantly changing social dynamics. Therefore, understanding the creator economy means understanding the new logic of capitalism, which is based on narrative, not simply production. Therefore, management research and practice need to broaden their theoretical horizons to accommodate the new reality where creativity and algorithms mutually shape the production of modern economic value.

METHOD

This research uses an interpretive qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, aiming to understand the experiences and construction of meaning within the creator economy within the context of digital business management. This approach was chosen because the creator economy phenomenon is socio-symbolic and cannot be measured quantitatively. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) emphasize that qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena through interpreting meanings that emerge within natural contexts.

A phenomenological design was used to explore the lived experiences of creators and business managers, in line with Creswell's (2014) view that phenomenology highlights the essence of human experience with a phenomenon. Data was collected through digital observation and social media content analysis of creators' activities on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram.

Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and interactive conclusion drawing. To maintain validity, triangulation of sources and methods was conducted, as recommended by Patton (2015), and member checking with participants to ensure interpretations aligned with their intended meaning.

The researcher applied reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) to control interpretive bias during the analysis process. Through this approach, the research is expected to explain how the creator economy shapes symbolic values, collaboration strategies, and new management patterns in the digital era, while also contributing to the development of creativity-based management theory and practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Reconstructing Economic Value in the Digital Creator Ecosystem

The creator economy represents a fundamental shift in the understanding of economic value, which has traditionally been associated with material production and the ownership of physical assets. Value has now shifted to the symbolic realm, where public attention has become the primary source of capital in the formation of economic value. This phenomenon demonstrates that the logic of contemporary capitalism has shifted from the production of goods to the production of meaning and experience, as Lazzarato (1996) argued in the concept of immaterial labor. Content creators act as producers of symbolic value, utilizing creativity, personal narratives, and digital interactions to build social legitimacy (Bhargava, 2022). Economic value is no longer measured through physical production, but rather through emotional resonance and audience engagement, which constitute the engagement economy. This demonstrates that digital capitalism operates through symbolic mediation, where value is produced through the circulation of self-representation and public participation.

This change demands a redefinition of the concept of work, as creator activity no longer fully follows conventional work logic based on hours and productivity, but rather on creativity, consistency, and cultural relevance. Bourdieu (1986) explains that new forms of capital can emerge from the conversion of symbolic capital such as trust and social recognition into economic capital when gaining public legitimacy. In the context of the creator economy, this conversion is evident in the creator's ability to transform social influence into commercial bargaining power for brands or platforms. The value mechanism is no longer linear between producers and consumers, but rather circular, with audiences actively participating in value formation (Fatimah et al., 2025). Thus, the creator economy represents a new form of participatory capitalism that relies on the production of narratives, not just the production of goods.

Research findings indicate that the value creation process in the creator ecosystem occurs through the interaction between narrative authenticity and algorithmic calculations. Creators construct digital personas perceived as authentic, but behind these are systematically planned communication strategies to maximize visibility and engagement. This phenomenon demonstrates the paradox between spontaneity and commodification, where authenticity becomes a consciously produced economic asset. In this context, economic value is performative; it is created through repeated representative actions that are accepted by the public as a form of authenticity. Companies collaborating with creators must understand the dynamics of this performativity to manage brand narratives without sacrificing the authenticity that is their primary appeal.

Furthermore, the creator economy demonstrates how economic value results from social and affective relationships. The relationship between creators and audiences is not merely transactional, but emotional and symbolic. Hafidz et al. (2025) emphasize that in cognitive capitalism, emotional and affective labor are crucial components in the production of value. Creators build personal relationships that foster audience loyalty, while companies leverage these relationships as channels for distributing brand meaning. Thus, value arises not only from individual creativity but also from the ability to build communities based on affection and participation.

Conceptually, the creator economy marks a paradigm shift in value from production to relations, from materiality to the symbolic, and from transaction to participation. Value is now the result of negotiations between identity, technology, and public perception. Therefore, understanding the creator economy requires a theoretical framework capable of explaining the relationship between representation, emotion, and power in the production of value. For business management, this signals the need for strategies that are not solely profit-oriented, but also focused on the creation of meaning and sustainable social legitimacy. Thus, the creator economy expands the boundaries of the management discipline into cultural and symbolic realms that have rarely been touched upon by classical management theory.

2. Shifting Management Models adn Collaborative Strategics between Brands adn Creators

The transformation of the creator economy has shifted the business management landscape from a rigid system to a fluid, collaborative, and symbolic value-oriented model. Companies that previously relied on hierarchical structures must now adapt to the creators' flexible, project-based work logic, which relies heavily on public dynamics. The concept of participatory culture explains that collaboration between producers and consumers in the digital era creates a form of co-creation that blurs the boundaries between creators and users. This phenomenon is reflected in the relationship between companies and creators, which is no longer based on one-way contracts but rather on the negotiation of meaning and roles. In this context, modern management is required to understand the logic of social media as a participatory space that cannot be fully controlled (Peres et al., 2024).

Collaboration between brands and creators creates a new form of leadership and coordination based on trust, not just formal authority. Research findings indicate that the success of collaboration is largely determined by the company's ability to align the brand narrative with the creator's communication style. This process requires a high level of symbolic awareness, as the value of a digital campaign is determined not only by the message but also by the emotional resonance and credibility of the narrative. Failure to understand this symbolic aspect can lead to dissonance in public perception, detrimental to both parties. Therefore, business management in the digital era must be able to act as a cultural mediator between corporations and online communities.

This shift in management structure also changes the control paradigm within organizations. Whereas control was previously exercised through hierarchy and procedures, it is now more cultural and value-based. Companies need to build a shared meaning system with creators to ensure consistent communication and brand representation (Filali et al., 2025). This model requires collaborative leadership that relies on empathy, adaptability, and the ability to understand digital social contexts. Drucker (2006) anticipated this shift through the concept of the knowledge worker, where individuals oriented toward ideas and creativity will become the new center of productivity. In the context of the creator economy, this means that creators are strategic actors in a knowledge- and meaning-based managerial system.

Furthermore, digital collaboration also creates new forms of decentralized work structures. Creators operate outside formal organizational boundaries, yet play a crucial role in shaping a brand's image and performance in the public sphere. This phenomenon creates what Castells (2009) calls a network society, where economic power is determined by the ability to manage social and information networks. Within this framework, business management no longer functions merely as a controller of resources, but as a regulator of the flow of meaning that connects brands, creators, and audiences (Kozinets, 2022). Therefore, successful management in the creator economy era depends on the adaptive ability to orchestrate collaboration across organizational boundaries.

The implications of this change are significant for management theory and practice. Organizational structures need to be revised to be more responsive to changing digital behaviors and social media dynamics. Management strategies can no longer be linear but must be ecosystem-based, positioning creators as strategic partners in value creation. Thus, business management focuses not only on coordinating internal resources but also on managing external relationships that are symbolic, dynamic, and based on public participation.

3. Algorithmic Dependence and Ethical Implications for the Sustainability of the Creator Economy

The creator economy operates in a digital space governed by algorithms, which determine the visibility, distribution, and economic opportunities of creators. This condition is known as digital capitalism, where algorithms function as a form of power that regulates access to public attention. Both creators and companies face significant dependence on the algorithmic logic of platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok (Sangputra & Asifah, 2024). When algorithms change, entire distribution and engagement strategies can be disrupted, creating economic instability beyond the control of actors. This phenomenon creates a new form of digital economic uncertainty that is systemic and invisible, yet directly impacts management strategies and business sustainability.

Dependence on algorithms also creates an asymmetrical power relationship between creators and platforms. Platforms retain full control over distribution mechanisms, while creators are subject to opaque technological rules. This phenomenon is known as algorithmic power, a new form of social control exercised through code and data. In the context of the creator economy, algorithms become "value determinants" that replace traditional market mechanisms (Zulkarnain, 2025). Consequently, business management strategies in the digital era must consider this technological dimension as a strategic variable influencing brand visibility and success. Failure to understand algorithmic logic will place companies in a passive position at the mercy of platforms.

Beyond the power dimension, algorithmic dependency also carries complex ethical implications. Creators are often compelled to adapt their creative behavior to algorithm-preferred patterns in order to maintain relevance. This phenomenon creates performative pressure that can lead to content homogenization and a decline in the quality of creative narratives. Mantini (2022), in his concept of surveillance capitalism, highlights how user data and behavior fuel the algorithmic economy, where creativity is reduced to prediction and control. This raises fundamental questions about the boundaries between creative freedom and algorithmic exploitation that leads to the commodification of digital identity.

For business management, this situation demands the emergence of new forms of digital ethics and responsible governance. Companies collaborating with creators must develop principles of transparency and fairness in data management, and ensure that algorithms are not used exploitatively. This approach aligns with Bonadio et al.'s (2022) perspective on information ethics, which emphasizes the need for a balance between technological innovation and human values. By implementing digital ethics, management not only protects brand reputation but also strengthens public trust in the creator economy ecosystem.

Ultimately, the sustainability of the creator economy depends on the ability of all creator actors, companies, and platforms to create a fair, transparent, and sustainable ecosystem. Reliance on algorithms must be balanced with digital literacy, ethical policies, and management models that place humans at the center of digital innovation. Thus, the creator economy is not only a commercial trend but also a new space for formulating a more humane economic paradigm that reflects the social complexities of contemporary technology.

CONCLUSIONS

The creator economy represents a fundamental transformation in the value structure and managerial logic of business in the digital era, where public attention, authenticity, and participation serve as the primary sources of symbolic capital that can be converted into economic value. This shift marks a shift from a material production-based economy to a meaning-based economy, where creativity and social engagement are the primary commodities. In this context, the relationship between creators, brands, and audiences is no longer transactional, but rather formed through dynamic, collaborative mechanisms based on trust. Modern business management is required to understand the fluid, non-hierarchical logic of social media, oriented toward participation and the co-production of meaning. Collaboration between brands and creators demands a new form of leadership grounded in empathy, flexibility, and sensitivity to digital cultural dynamics. However, the success of this ecosystem is inseparable from the structural challenge of dependence on algorithms that determine the distribution of value and access to public attention. This dependence creates new inequalities between creators and platforms, and raises ethical issues related to data exploitation and performative pressures on individual creativity. Therefore, the sustainability of the creator economy requires a management paradigm that is oriented not only toward efficiency and profit, but also toward ethical responsibility and social balance. Adaptive management must be able to interpret the interactions between technology, culture, and economics as a complex and interconnected system. In theory, the creator economy expands the boundaries of management discipline into symbolic and affective domains previously marginalized within the framework of classical economics. Practically, this phenomenon demands a reformulation of business strategies that are more sensitive to meaning, narrative, and social legitimacy. Thus, the creator economy is not simply a digital trend, but a reflection of an epistemological shift in how humans understand value, power, and work in the algorithmic era.

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