

## **Commodification and Exploitation of Children in Television Content Programs and New Media Content (Case Study of Fajar Labatjo Alias Fajar Sadboy)**

**M. Arifin Ritani Noor**

Kalimantan Selatan

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### **Abstract**

Cases of commodification of children are increasingly common, various television programs and online media have shown many children who are considered viral. The television and online industries take advantage of the child's virality value to be converted into exchange rates. Commodification, which is a term that refers to the practice of converting use value into exchange value, has been used in this context. One of the things that has recently become the object of commodification by television and online media is children. Children are considered attractive to advertisers because they are relatively malleable and influenced by their surroundings, and can be used as an attraction for audiences because of their innocence. This study aimed to explore forms of commodification of children, especially in the viral context of Farar Labadjo or who is known to the public as Fajar Sadboy. To understand this form of commodification, this research adopted the basic theory of media political economy proposed by Vincent Mosco. The research method used in this research was critical discourse analysis developed by Norman Firclough. A qualitative approach with descriptive research type was used in this research. The results of this study revealed various forms of commodification of children in television showed and online media based on the theory of media political economy. In this context, children were exploited and forced to perform various activities in order to fulfill the demand for content in the program. Besides that, Children are also used as a tool to increase advertising rates and get a share of the profits for program owners. One of the most striking forms of commodification is the large number of similar programs that invite children because there is an exchange value from the large number of viewers and increased content traffic. This study concludes that there are various forms of commodification in Television and Online Media programs effectively "commodifying" children's virility and even taking advantage of controversies and tragic incidents for profit.

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### **Corresponding Author:**

M. Arifin Ritani Noor

South Kalimantan

Email: [Ariefritaninoor@gmail.com](mailto:Ariefritaninoor@gmail.com)

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

One way television achieves profits is by turning things into commodities. Commodification is the process of changing the use value of goods and services (which is based on the ability to meet needs) into an exchange value (which is based on the market). This is a new term that allows approaching mass media in the context of political economy. The political economy approach put forward by Vincent Mosco in his book, "Political Economy: Rethinking and Renewal," refers to the study of social relations, especially power relations, which together influence aspects of production, distribution and consumption of existing resources.

Recently, television and internet media have used children as an object of commodification. Children are an attraction for advertisers on television and online media. This is because today's children are exposed to various types of media, so many people think that they live in a screen culture. They spend a lot of time interacting with the media, such as watching television, listening to the radio, using the internet, playing video games, using cell phones, and so on. Children become more and more accustomed to media use, which in turn can affect their mental development and social interactions.

In December 2022 one of the children's viral stories about their love went viral, it didn't take long for several television channels to become involved in the phenomenon this went viral. This viral story is about the story of Fajar Labatjo alias Fajar Sadboy who tells the story of his broken heart. Fajar also often appears as a guest star on artist podcasts. Fajar, who is only 15 years old,

is also often invited to several television entertainment shows. Television took advantage of his love story to provide entertainment about the story of the heartbreak he experienced. Fajar's story packaging and innocent character have made many television stations and artists compete to invite Fajar for the sake of ratings. In fact, indirectly there is a process of exploiting children for the sake of the economy, in this case increasing TV income both in terms of material and ratings.

Polemics then emerged from several content creators, one of whom was Deddy Corbuzier, who questioned Fajar's presence in the television entertainment space. According to him, Fajar Sadboy is still considered a minor and is not yet fit to appear before the public with brings a story of heartbreak. Therefore, in this case, Deddy questioned the role of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI). Where are the KPIs? According to Deddy, KPI gave the impression of ignoring television shows involving minors. Meanwhile, in general, the function of mass media is said to have entertainment, educational and informative functions.

in Law no. 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection Understanding children based on Article 1 paragraph (1) of Law No. 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection, namely a child is someone who is not yet 18 (eighteen) years old, including children who are still in the womb.

So it is very clear that Fajar is included in the child category because he is only 15 years old. Children are weak social creatures, children are often placed in the most disadvantaged position, children often become victims of violence and violations of their rights. The right to play and the right to learn, and what is more to watch out for, namely dawn, is the object of children's commodification.

We should not make small children as business objects. There is still a lack of public awareness of child development, which causes there to be a lot of exploitation of children. However, exploitation of children is currently a concern for mass media producers as an attractive art form to display on television. Exploitation of children with artistic values displayed on television is a form of commodification.

The aimed of this research was to reveal practices involving the commodification of children in television programs and online media. This research used critical discourse analysis to analyze how children were treated in the media, especially in the viral broadcast of the Fajar Labatjo case. Researchers also connected it with the theory of media as a cultural industry. It hoped that the results of this research contributed to the field of communication science, especially in the study of television media and new media, namely online media.

It hoped that this research will provide understanding to the general public to doubt the exploitation and commodification of minors in many television shows. In this way, parents can select good and quality programs for their children's mental and psychological development. Apart from that, it hoped that parents will become aware and care about every child's right to enjoy playing, learning and interacting socially with their environment.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mosco (1996:142), commodification is the process of transforming use value into exchange value. This concept of commodification is important in understanding media phenomena from a critical political economy perspective. Astuti (2005:23) means that media is a tool for turning something into an object that can be traded. In the context of the television industry, commercialization occurs through the commodification of broadcast content, where media content is made into a commodity on offer. This commodification process involves the transformation of data into a meaning system by media actors, which is then sold to consumers, audiences and advertising companies (Mosco, 1996: 146-147).

Based on Mosco's understanding above, media is a means of turning content into tradable products. In the context of commodification in the media, Nasrullah (2012: 168) states that Mosco formulates three forms of commodification, namely: (a) commodification of content, which explains how content or media content is produced as a commodity offered; (b) consumer commodification, which refers to the way the media transforms audiences into a market that can be reached by advertisers; and (c)

commodification of production, which includes how the media production process also involves commodification in terms of technology, labor, and other resources (Mosco, 1996:146-147).

Mass media management is considered as an industry that shapes the media culture industry itself. The media industry is included in the economic culture, which has its own principles and laws (Garnham in McQuail, 2008: 82). There is a conflict between the demands of the media industry, which emphasizes capital competition, and the demands of morality. The media must maintain its idealism and morality, but must also consider its existence in a climate of cultural industrialization (Agung, 2010: 18; Marxist).

Political economy theory is a social critical approach that focuses on the relationship between the economic structure and dynamics of the media industry and the ideological content of the media. In this perspective, media institutions are considered as part of the economic system which is closely related to the political system. The impact can be seen in the reduction of independent media sources, concentration on larger audiences, risk aversion, and reduced capital on less profitable media assignments such as investigative reporting and documentary filmmaking. This also results in the neglect of smaller and poorer potential audiences, and there is often an imbalance in media coverage (McQuail, 2011: 5).

There are many perspectives that examine the role of mass media in society. The mass media do not operate freely in society, but are always bound by various socio-economic and political interests. One perspective that is developing is the economic perspective. The study of the political economy of the media tries to show that the mass media is related to structural economic processes by society.

In the political economy theory of media, media institutions must be considered as part of the economic system which is also closely related to the political system. The quality of knowledge produced by the media for society is largely determined by various exchange rates the type of content in conditions that encourage message dissemination. It is also influenced by the economic interests of media owners and policy makers (Garnham in McQuail, 1991). Media acts as an agent for message consumption, where individuals or groups consume with different meanings of reality. The media provides framing to events, and these framings give certain meanings and special symbols to these events when they are received by the audience. The media also determines whether the event is considered important or not (McQuail, 1991).

Views about children have changed over time. In the Middle Ages, there was an opinion that children were adults in miniature, so they were treated like adults. In the 17th or 18th century, the idea emerged that childhood was a special period of development, with unique psychological, educational, and physical needs. However, there is still controversy surrounding how to understand and adapt to these needs.

According to Rousseau, childhood is divided into two periods, namely early childhood (age 2-12 years) and late childhood (age 12-15 years). Early childhood is characterized by the child's ability to be independent, such as walking, eating, talking and running. In this period, children begin to develop intuitive reasoning related to body movements and senses. Meanwhile, late childhood is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. In this period, children gain extraordinary physical strength, and also experience significant cognitive development (Pratisti, 2011: 3).

In this case the Indonesian government also regulates laws regarding children, according to Republic of Indonesia Law no. 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection Article 4

“Every child has the right to live, grow, develop and participate actively reasonable in accordance with human dignity, as well as protection from violence and discrimination.”

Article 11

“Every child has the right to rest and take advantage of free time, to socialize with others children of the same age, play, have fun and be creative according to their interests, talents and level of intelligence for the sake of self-development.”

Firmly the State has determined the age of the child, the age of the child is very important in child protection cases, so that it can be used to find out whether a person is suspected of being used or if a child has committed a crime, whether that person is included in the category of child or not. Commodification is the process of converting use values, namely values based on the

ability to meet needs, into market-based exchange rates. In the television industry, commercialization occurs through the process of commodification of broadcast content with the aim of obtaining financial exchange rates through advertising activities. Ratings are an important instrument for measuring the extent to which broadcast content meets the commodification rules. According to Beville, a rating is the estimated percent of all television houses, or of all people within a demographic group, in the survey area sample who views a specific program or station (Triputra, 2006: 1-6).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive data analysis method. Descriptive research was conducted when there was information about a problem or situation, but this information was not detailed enough. Therefore, the researcher conducted a detailed description related to the problem. This research studied the problems in society, procedures that apply, situations, attitudes, views, ongoing processes, and the influence of a phenomenon. Researchers develop concepts and collect facts, but do not test hypotheses (Kriyantono, 2006:23).

The method used in this research was critical discourse analysis. In media studies, although still within the framework of discourse analysis, the critical paradigm tried to look for various other possibilities that influence the process of production and reproduction of meaning. According to Foucault, discourse is the field of all statements, both as individualization of groups of statements and as regulative practices involving a number of statements (Mills, 1997: 8). Eriyanto (2005:5) defines discourse analysis as an effort to uncover the hidden intentions of the speaker in his statements. Discourse is a social practice that constructs reality and involves a dialectical relationship between the events discussed and certain social, cultural and ideological contexts. Language is considered important in presenting the discourse maker's intentions (Kriyantono, 2004:

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA - Critical Discourse Analysis) is a type of discourse analysis research that specifically studies the abuses of social power, domination, and inequality that are formed, produced, and challenged through texts and speech in social and political contexts. CDA principles have been found in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School before World War II (Rasmussen, 1996). Critical discourse analysis sees discourse as a form of social practice. Describing discourse as a social practice leads to an understanding of the dialectical relationship between certain discursive events and the situations, institutions and social structures that shape them.

Primary data was obtained through observations through online videos and television shows. During this observation, the writer analyzes the broadcasts which contain information about the depiction of the commodification of children. Secondary data was obtained through literature studies from various sources such as books, papers, journals, and internet data related to the commodification and political economy theory of media. Relevant information was obtained from these publications.

Data analysis is the process of measuring and organizing data into basic categories and sequence patterns. Data analysis aims to reach conclusions that have scientific proportions based on the interpretation of the data. In qualitative communication research, data analysis is carried out to transform data into a narrative form that leads to scientific findings.

In the context of this study, qualitative communication research aimed to provide an overview or understanding of how and why the communication phenomenon under study occurs. Triangulation techniques are used as a way to check the validity of data by utilizing other sources. There are four kinds of triangulation that can be used, namely triangulation with sources, methods, investigators, and theories. Through triangulation, researchers can verify findings by comparing them with different sources, methods or theories. This was done to ensure the accuracy and validity of the research data.

By using various data collection methods and triangulation techniques, this study aims to produce findings that have scientific rigor and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of child commodification.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULT

In an event of television and podcast that Fajar was presented as a child who has talents in teasing, flirting, singing, but is attractive with his innocence. Fajar was also represented as a child who cares about his family and friends. Fajar was also seen as a little boy who can seduce the opposite sex, which can be proven through his appearance when given the opportunity to show his ability in processing words.

In the various television shows and podcasts that he attended, they were presented as a place or vessel that seemed to be a third party to reconcile Fajar with a girl he thought was his heart. They receive input from the host and receive jokes that were considered fun by the host.

The identity he wanted to display was that this event was a forum for Fajar to show his abilities and talents. However, on the other hand, it also wanted to display the ideology of television as a media industry that has economic interests. This was reflected in the presenter's invitation to viewers to continue watching what the final outcome of Fajar's peace will be.

##### Forms of Commodification Exploitation

- Television shows that invite artists who were popular because of their beauty or good looks.
- Reality shows that tell the sad story of a person or group of people, the purpose of which was to attract the attention and sympathy of the audience.
- Television shows that were deliberately made sensational about certain problems, with the aim of attracting the audience's interest.
- Soap operas made by having rising actors and actresses as the main characters, with the aim of attracting the attention of the audience.

Television shows that also use children to be used in a commodification way, namely Little Idol, Little Idol can be said to be the creator of a different world full of imitations, fakes, and superficiality, where children grow up in small bodies and are forced to grow up too much. fast. They are forced to become 'mini adults' because they look like adult artists, with a look that looks very artificial and contrived.

According to Surastuti Nurdadi or Nuki, a child development psychologist from the University of Indonesia, paracontestants experience jumps in life stages, from playing life to working as if they were "mini-adults" (Fariana, 2008: 1). Their schedule is very tight, starting from concert preparations, rehearsals, advertising requests, recording for dials, to playing in soap operas. They even have to work late at night if the shooting schedule is very busy. Even though they are stars, in reality they are 'carbitant' products to fulfill capitalist interests. The impact of this situation was that their school schedule was neglected, because the contestants had to spend their time outside of school while still participating in singing performances.

In the production process There are efforts on television that show that children are commodified in children's singing talent search events or reality shows. The form of commodification that is widely used in the television production process, especially in the case of Dawn Sadboy, is content commodification. Children are exploited to increase program ratings and shares so that lots of advertisements come in. Fajar is used to become a more innocent person through his love story. The stories that Fajar tells are sometimes not according to his age. Apart from that, Fajar is required to work from his village to Jakarta only for the sake of television or podcasts. Fajar is also required to add spice to his love story with his romance so that the audience can be entertained by his innocence. Apart from that, Fajar was also invited to become a talent for advertising or program supporting products, so that their time was pledged. Those who should be enjoying playing, socializing and studying, instead have to risk their time in the hope of becoming an "artist".

The form of commodification that is most visible in the television program that invites the dawn is bringing women who he really likes to the program, under the pretext of wanting to reconcile and mediate between the two, the bringing of these children is an important thing for the television because the audience and the two children have a mutual relationship dependence on each other. This commodification is usually the main tool for changing social relations into economic relations. Thus, it can then be said that commodification of media content means changing messages into products that can be marketed. The value of a commodity does not depend on the benefits provided, but on the number of ratings as a measure of value. As a result, the media treats everything as a commodity, including love, dreams, bodies, beauty, art, music and voice. (Ibrahim, 2000:149)

When media products are made into commodities for sale, media companies are no different from the shoe industry which does not have ideals about serving the public interest, but only thinks about how to produce shoes that consumers like and sell well. (Fajar, 2005:23).

As a television broadcasting business institution, its main objective is to achieve maximum profit. One way to do this is by selling program slots to advertisers. Advertising is the main source of income for the television industry, and the more advertising that comes in, the better for the continuity of television. However, if the number of advertisements decreases, television will have difficulty surviving.

Advertisers do not carelessly choose programs to market their products. They will choose excellent programs that are watched by many viewers. Program ratings and shares are important indicators for advertisers to determine which programs are mostly watched by viewers. If the program rating and share are high, then the number of viewers will also be large. Therefore, advertisers will be more interested in marketing their products in the program.

In an effort to achieve profits, television often violates existing rules to achieve these goals. One of the most widespread violations is the lack of protection for viewers, especially children, in program content. Broadcasting laws provide for the protection and empowerment of specific audiences, including children and young people, but this is often neglected.

Commodification is also a common practice in television programs and online media, where children are exploited for commercial purposes. Children's talent programs became popular by luring children with "false dreams" and taking advantage of their innocence. Children are also used as a tool to increase program ratings and shares. Overall, television as a business industry has a very strong economic motivation, and to achieve that goal. Meanwhile, online media has the motivation to increase broadcast time as well as subscribe and YouTube account traffic from its invitees.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on this research, it can be concluded that children in this program were treated as commodities to make money. The production process involves a real effort in commodifying children in reality shows. One form of commodification that is widely used in Television Programs and Podcast was the commodification of content. Children were exploited to increase program ratings and shares so that many advertisements enter, subscribe, and also the popularity of the program. They were forced to appear as more mature individuals through love stories as if they were adults and not according to their age and abilities. In addition, they are required to work for famous lures or even promised material.

They also have to do a series of activities that were only appropriate for adults, such as flirting, giving love advice, giving poetry, and being the object of humor. Often, they are also asked to be a talent for advertising or program support products. Their time was tied up in this program. Those who should be able to enjoy playing, socializing, and studying have had to sacrifice their time to become "National Artists". The most obvious form of commodification in Programs.

This commodification was often the main tool for changing social relations into economic relations. Thus, commodification of media content transforms messages into marketable products. The value of a commodity did not depend on its utility, but on the number of hours of labor used

as a measure of value. As a result, the media treats everything as a commodity, not only love, dreams, but also bodies, beauty, art, music and voices (Ibrahim, 2000: 149). When media products become traded commodities, media companies are no different from the shoe industry which does not have ideals about serving the public interest, but only focuses on how to produce shoes that consumers like and sell well (Fajar, 2005:23).

Based on the results of this study, the researchers suggested to workers and practitioners in the broadcasting industry and the online media industry to always pay attention to every detail of content when producing programs. Every broadcast or program content must pay attention to and protect the interests of children. Children should not be used as tools to generate lucrative profits. In addition, parents must have awareness and concern that every child has the right to play, learn, and socialize with the surrounding environment, not to be included in events that sacrifice their childhood. Children aged 7-15 years are very vulnerable and easily influenced in achieving their dreams of becoming famous.

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