*Article*

# Domination and the Arts of Digital Resistance in Social Media Creator Labor

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## Abstract

This article conducts a collaborative qualitative thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with social media content creators ($N = 53$) based in and/or originated from the United Kingdom. It aims to better understand how creators within one peripheral region in Northern England express their labor experiences as both practices of domination and e-resistance. The article contributes an original typology of the relationships between practices of creator domination and forms of individual or collective e-resistance, encompassing varying levels of visibility, targets, sources, and underlying motives. It develops a novel creator workers' inquiry methodology to establish this multifaceted typology of creator e-resistance. The findings suggest that creator e-resistance should consider the relationships among practices of material, status, and ideological domination, and forms of non-resistance, individual hidden e-resistance, collective hidden e-resistance, and collective public e-resistance.

The low barriers to entry in platform-based screen media have created opportunities for workforce diversity and labor resistance among social media content creators (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022). In 2022, the United Kingdom had an estimated 16.6 million creators out of the 303 million total creators globally, reflecting an increase of 8 million creators in the country since 2020 (Adobe, 2022). In addition, YouTube alone injected more than £1.4 billion into the country's gross domestic product in 2021 and supported 40,000 full-time equivalent jobs (Oxford Economics, 2022). Despite platform ownership concentration (Baym, 2021), social media practices still present avenues for marginalized groups to broaden access to transmedia content creation and build supportive online creator networks (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022). However, such creator work is often precarious, disproportionately affecting historically marginalized groups: insecure, low or unpaid, and lacking social security benefits, professional support, and trade union representation (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022; Salamon, 2023b). Initiatives by platform companies, like YouTube Black Voices, have aimed to address some of these issues, but challenges persist.

This article examines the dual experiences of labor domination and e-resistance among creators in or from Yorkshire and the Humber, United Kingdom. Creators use various video-sharing platforms to produce, distribute, and monetize their content while building online audiences. This article develops an original typology of their e-resistance practices. It is grounded in a theorization of resistance, a creator workers' inquiry, and collaborative qualitative analysis (CQA) approach to thematic analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews with creators ($N = 53$).

With a population exceeding five million, Yorkshire is the largest county in England, encompassing some of the United Kingdom's most-populated cities: Sheffield, Leeds, and Bradford (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Historically, it was characterized by significant industrial wealth and working-class rebellions (Jewell, 1994; Morgan, 2002; Taylor, 2001). However, Yorkshire faced significant economic and social difficulties since the mid-twentieth century. The impacts of deindustrialization and neoliberal policies were acutely felt, as wealth and power were concentrated in

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London and the South of England. The government's 2022 policy agenda *Leveling Up the United Kingdom* again highlighted persistent geographic and economic disparities, high rates of low-paid jobs, and social deprivation (His Majesty's Government, 2022; Salamon, 2023b). This context is important for understanding regional creators' experiences of labor domination and resistance.

Considering this context, this article develops a novel conceptual understanding of e-resistance and a creator workers' inquiry methodology. It contributes a relational approach to labor domination and resistance. Acknowledging Foucault's (1978) assertion, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power," this study emphasizes the dialectical relationship between domination and resistance in digital labor (Jarrett, 2022). We develop a new typology of individual and collective e-resistance practices, including the forms, degrees of visibility, targets, sources, and underlying motives.

The following research question guides this article: How do social media content creators express their labor experiences as both practices of domination and e-resistance? First, this article critically reviews literature on critical political economy of media and creator studies alongside critical organizational studies of industrial relations to build a framework of creator labor domination and e-resistance. Next, it establishes a creator workers' inquiry methodology and conducts a CQA thematic analysis of interviews with creators to develop a typology of creator e-resistance. The discussion and conclusion section addresses the implications of this approach for future research on digital labor and resistance.

## Literature Review

### Social Media Content Creator Labor Domination

This subsection critically examines how creators' labor processes have been organized in social media content production and the ensuing domination they have experienced. Researchers have considered social media content creation as a contemporary material manifestation of precarious or nonstandard neoliberal labor within the digital creative and cultural economy (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Poell et al., 2022; Salamon, 2023a; Saunders, 2020). This creator labor is characterized by a blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries between work and leisure (Abidin, 2016; Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022). Creators experience an expanded workday and often accept unpaid content creation; their passion and creative expression are deemed sufficient rewards (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy & Sawey, 2021). Creators are required to be adaptable and resourceful, developing various technological and communicative skills that are emblematic of the "autodidactic tradition" within entrepreneurial tech culture (Marwick, 2013, p. 169).

Creators also encounter an influencer pay gap (Christin & Lu, 2023; Poell et al., 2022), difficulties in securing promised payments from companies, receiving non-monetary compensations (e.g., gifts), and being forced to work multiple jobs on zero-hour contracts to meet financial obligations (Abidin, 2016; Gerhards, 2019; Kopf, 2020). These exploitative labor conditions are compounded by platforms' payment initiatives, exemplified by YouTube's Partner Program, which disproportionately exclude creators from historically marginalized backgrounds (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020; Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021; Kopf, 2020). Research further indicates racial disparities when creators negotiate compensation and brand deals (Christin & Lu, 2023; Poell et al., 2022). Some creators feel that platforms render them invisible due to their marginalized social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability) or their politicized content genres (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020; Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021; Johnson, 2019; Poell et al., 2022). Algorithms help determine creators' visibility and success, forcing them to navigate platforms' rapid and unpredictable changes (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022). These exploitative labor practices and punitive measures (e.g., automated bans and suspensions) underscore the racial and heteronormative discrimination of platform capitalism (Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021) and lack of regulation and protection of creators' rights (Baym, 2021; Caplan & Gillespie, 2020; Cunningham & Craig, 2021; Srnicek, 2017).

Social media platforms still provide creators with status advantages, enabling participation to cultivate micro-celebrity status and self-brands (Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021; Poell et al., 2022; Scolere et al., 2018; Senft, 2013). However, these aspirational labor practices lead some, particularly female creators, to engage in self-exploitation and "visibility labor" to strategically manage their online presence (Abidin, 2016, p. 90). This form of subconscious immaterial labor (Lazzarato, 1996; Senft, 2013) or exploitative "tacit labor" often goes unrecognized as work (Abidin, 2016, p. 90). Moreover, creators engage in unpaid relational labor with their audiences, leveraging platforms' communicative and networked affordances (Baym, 2015). Such relational labor involved in community development and maintenance, termed "communtainment" ( E. J.Zhao, 2016, p. 5454), is vital for creators to build a successful cross-platform brand (Abidin, 2016; Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022; Scolere et al., 2018). Collectively, these practices of domination underscore the challenges creators face and issues creators might resist in reshaping prevailing conditions in social media production.

### Social Media Content Creator Resistance

This subsection documents various forms, degrees of visibility, and specific targets of individual or collective resistance to domination. Sobande et al. (2020) write, "Resistance

exists on a spectrum that spans from highly visible and direct modes of activism, to less discernible oppositional struggles" (p. 415). *Individual resistance* practices address creators' various labor issues. For example, some creators embed product placement in their videos, challenging platforms' dominant revenue-sharing programs; others critique platform governance mechanisms and use coded messages to resist algorithmic detection (Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Lin, 2021; Tarvin & Stanfill, 2022).

Creators also engage in *individually-driven collective action*, forming professional networks through particular creators' individual actions to cope with the precarious digital labor market (Meisner, 2023; Soriano et al., 2021). These actions also revolve around individual creators' audiences, rather than a wider collective network. Some creators become solo worker-agencies to coach others one on one, while others address online abuse through ad hoc networks. While temporary, creators build solidarity networks, offering tools, tactics, and emotional support (Bonini & Treré, 2024). For example, individual anti-haul YouTube beauty vloggers resist consumerism, fostering unity within their specific community that shares a common purpose manifested through particular creators' individual actions (Wood, 2021). Through these practices, creators enact "collectivity and [a] solidaristic spirit" to navigate and challenge various domination issues (Soriano et al., 2021, p. 107). However, these practices might not transform wider structural inequities, as they are individualistic.

Research extends to creators from historically marginalized backgrounds or political ideologies, foregrounding how they create alternative content, disrupt aesthetic standards, and reshape mainstream media narratives. Leveraging platforms' affordances, Latinx creators resist homogenizing narratives (Villa-Nicholas, 2019); plus-size influencers challenge stereotypes; Black creators share community knowledge (Arthur, 2021; Duthely, 2022; Sobande et al., 2020) or gossip about algorithmic visibility (Bishop, 2019; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024); Jewish creators foster counterpublics against antisemitism (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022); and BreadTubers elevate leftist content to resist YouTube's algorithms and establish a communal support infrastructure (Cotter, 2024; Kuznetsov & Ismangil, 2020). In addition, some creators strategically adopt digital collective action, fostering counterpublics while addressing cultural appropriation and online hate through "gesticular activism," like hashtag campaigns (X. Zhao & Abidin, 2023). Digital technology, activism, and identity shape how these creators individually and collectively navigate, gain visibility in, and (re)structure the social media entertainment (SME) industry.

Additional studies have considered creators' organic or experimental *communitarian-driven* collective resistance actions regarding working conditions, pay, professionalization, and online abuse. Communitarian actions facilitate civic activism or advocacy, emphasizing creators' role in standing up with audiences to influence best practices for the SME industry and wider social change (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). Creators also resist personalized metrics, pursue alternative income streams, and form engagement pods to boost each other's visibility (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Christin & Lewis, 2021; O'Meara, 2019). Some creators further build alternative online communities to share advice and professionalization resources, particularly due to online abuse (Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Tomlinson, 2024). In addition, collective organizations, like Germany's YouTubers Union, the United Kingdom's The Creator Union, and the American Influencer Council, have aimed to formalize industry standards to bolster creators' careers (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Jarrett, 2022; Niebler, 2020; Vandaele, 2021).

However, research suggests that collective resistance is not the dominant manifestation of labor agency among platform workers (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Vandaele, 2021). Resistance can be problematically mired in individualism, leading to a *feeling* of having rejected something exploitative without necessarily effecting changes in working practices or fostering a desire for sustainable collective action (Jarrett, 2022). Traditional trade unions struggle to establish a foothold in social media production, while grassroots efforts lack financial resources and legal recognition to ensure a lasting impact (Baym, 2021; Jarrett, 2022). Resistance can also be co-opted (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024; Villa-Nicholas, 2019; Wood, 2021), as creators participate in "hierarchical capitalist, racist and sexist [media and internet] infrastructures" (Sobande et al., 2020, p. 415).

Despite exceptions, this literature leans toward a homogeneous understanding of creator domination and resistance, with its "multifaceted characteristics" remaining underdeveloped (Pal & Dutta, 2008, p. 54). Duffy and Meisner (2023) propose reframing these creator practices within a dialectic of "platform punishments and expressions of creator discipline" (p. 301). However, we need a heterogenous and flexible approach to exploring creators' "struggle within all the moments of its articulation [. . .] for insight into the nature of work" (Jarrett, 2022, p. 192). Further research is needed to examine the diverse and interrelated manifestations of resistance (Bonini & Treré, 2024). Considerations of its forms, visibility, targets, sources, and motives are necessary to better understand creator resistance and contribute to broader debates on creator culture and social media labor.

## Organizing Labor Domination and E-resistance Practices

This subsection establishes heterogenous characteristics of resistance, including the multifaceted tensions between creators' labor domination and e-resistance practices. Mumby et al. (2017) offer a typology of resistance, ranging from small-scale individual hidden practices to "large-scale social and political transformation" of collective public practices (p. 1164). Drawing on Scott's (1990) conceptualization of

resistance dynamics, individual and collective infrapolitics encompass "a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance" that operate discreetly and anonymously (p. 19). Individual insubordination and collective insurrection are public and explicitly oppositional (Mumby et al., 2017). Subordinates articulate resistance against three distinct forms of domination: material (e.g., labor); status (e.g., humiliation, insults, and attacks on dignity); or ideological (e.g., justifications for hierarchies; Scott, 1990). Hidden resistance practices against material domination include poaching, desertion, evasion, and anonymous threats. Practices to resist status domination include gossip, rumor, and the building of autonomous social spaces for subordinates to assert their dignity. Hidden resistance practices to ideological domination include the formation of dissident subcultures. Forms of public resistance to material domination include boycotts and strikes. Public resistance to status domination expresses subordinates' affirmations of self-worth. Finally, public resistance to ideological domination involves subordinates promoting counter-ideologies advocating for equality, revolution, or challenging the dominant ideology. Scott (1990) writes, "[R]esistance to ideological domination requires a counter-ideology—a negation—that will effectively provide a general normative form to the host of resistant practices invented in self-defense by any subordinate group" (p. 118). Thus, subordinates' resistance not only reacts to dominant ideologies but also offers alternative ideological perspectives, challenging prevailing norms and providing a foundation for their diverse resistance practices (see Supplemental Material—Table 1).

Workers have leveraged the internet's technological and social affordances, developing innovative e-resistance practices linked to their material, status, and ideological domination, which extend offline (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Mumby et al., 2017; Salamon, 2023a). McDonald and Thompson (2016) emphasize how "the use of social media destabilizes private/public boundaries and opens up or facilitates new terrains on which contestation may arise" (p. 75). This complex understanding of resistance sets the stage for examining how creators navigate various practices of domination and adapt forms of traditional resistance within SME. It provides the foundation for our conceptual framework, examining the dynamics of creator domination and e-resistance.

## Method

Our examination of creators' labor experiences as both practices of domination and e-resistance is grounded in a CQA thematic analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews with creators based in and/or originating from Yorkshire ($N$=53). To identify interviewees, the research team mapped the creator workforce in Yorkshire based on keyword and hashtag searches ($N$=326; Highfield & Leaver, 2015). Video-based platforms in the search included Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, OnlyFans, Twitch, Snapchat,

and Pinterest ($n$=212), supplemented by Google Search ($n$=113) and snowball sampling ($n$=1). We included creators who produce content across two or more platforms and used keywords and hashtags related to Yorkshire's local authority districts (e.g., Leeds, Sheffield, York, and so on), self-presentation of identities, autobiographies, content types, creator types, dates accounts created, total videos/posts, total subscribers/followers, and engagement metrics. Acknowledging that this research is exploratory, we did not intend to be representative of the region's creator workforce (Babbie, 2021). We recruited 51 creators out of the 326 identified for interviews, contacting them through emails publicly posted on their social media accounts or direct messaging on one of their platforms; two interviews involved two creators each.

We conducted online interviews between June and September 2022 through Google Meet and Microsoft Teams, audio-recorded them, and used a professional service to transcribe them. Most interviewees participated from their home studio workspaces. The interviews ranged from 27 to 116 minutes, averaging 69 minutes. The transcriptions totaled 1,185 pages. Participants were compensated £70 each for their involvement and provided their written informed consent. This project received institutional research ethics approval. To foster open communication, participants were offered the option to remain anonymous. To protect their identities, we assigned random interviewee numbers. Some participants chose to be identified by their given or creator names (see Supplemental Material—Table 2). Participants contribute to one or more self-described content type, encompassing original short-form video, long-form video, and/or photography. The highest proportion of content types include lifestyle, gaming, travel, beauty, fashion, food, student vlogs and education, family and parenting, disability, health and wellness, Yorkshire life, fitness, music, book reviews, and comedy. In addition, participants use two or more platforms, predominately YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, Twitch, and/or Pinterest. Most participants are nano-influencers (1,000–10,000 followers), followed by micro-influencers (10,000–50,000 followers), and mid-tier influencers (50,000–500,000 followers) on one or more of their accounts (Geyser, 2023; HypeAuditor, 2023).

These interviews were conducted within the framework of what we term a *creator workers' inquiry*. Rooted in 101 questions Marx (1880/1938) distributed to factory workers, researchers have adapted this method for studying digital platform workers (Englert et al., 2020; Salamon, 2020). This approach seeks to gather information on workers' demographics, expertise in their field, nature of their workplaces, employment relationships, working hours, labor processes, wages, introduction of new technologies, and forms of resistance. We consider creators as workers experiencing "exploitation through the wage relation" (Englert et al., 2020, p. 135) and/or volunteering their free labor for content creation, *potentially* employing different resistance practices. We

asked interviewees a wide range of open-ended questions covering their demographic backgrounds, labor experiences, and perceptions as creators. Topics include the production process of cross-platform content creation, diversity and inclusion (including regional Yorkshire brand identity), and labor conditions, rights, and protections. The latter topic encompasses perceived power relationships among creators, platforms, and audiences within content production, circulation, and monetization.

This article grounds the interview data in a CQA thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Richards & Hemphill, 2018). We aimed to balance rigor, transparency, and trustworthiness, addressing challenges inherent in team-based qualitative analysis. This approach enabled us to foster consistency and consensus in the coding process without relying on quantifying intercoder reliability. To mitigate possible biases in the analysis and foster collaboration, the research team initially met to co-create a plan for data analysis and shape the project's direction. We deliberated on the project's guiding concepts and research question related to the tensions between labor domination and resistance, as identified from the literature review and individual interviews conducted by each team member. We intentionally sought to uncover new insights that could extend or challenge existing conceptual perspectives.

Each team member subsequently familiarized themselves with the entire dataset, independently reviewing transcripts and making memos in a shared Google Doc regarding potential first-order codes (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The team then convened to compare and discuss these memos, finalized the research question, and developed a codebook through open and axial coding, comprising three master codes and 18 subcodes. Next, each team member applied the final codebook, independently coding the same two transcripts, and met again to compare their transcripts, ensure mutual understanding, and discuss common patterns. NVivo CAQDAS was used to archive, code, and analyze the transcripts. Each team member was then assigned a different batch of transcripts for independent split coding and met several more times to discuss each other's coding. After completing all coding, the authors met to discuss generative themes, with each author presenting the themes they identified. They reached a consensus on three themes and added annotations to highlight key data excerpts and provide thick descriptions of the themes. The authors then partially recoded the previously coded transcripts to ensure they closely aligned with the team's collective understanding.

## Findings

Framed by CQA thematic analysis, the following three subsections outline how Yorkshire creators navigate and express their labor experiences through the interplay between practices of domination and e-resistance. We illuminate the heterogenous forms of non-resistance or e-resistance to material domination and/or status domination issues, revealing their implications for better understanding ideological domination (see Supplemental Material—Table 3). We elucidate the multifaceted ways creators negotiate power relations and assert their agency in the SME industry.

### Non-Resistance

This subsection addresses Yorkshire creators' non-resistance practices. Non-resistance involves creators' strategic decisions to abstain from resisting material domination, thereby sustaining existing power relations. These decisions are intricately related to how creators describe content creation as a form of work and their associated employment rights. There is an entrenched notion that content creation does not fit conventional definitions of work. Creators are motivated by fun and political or creative self-expression, with the lines blurred between content creation and everyday life activities. Yorkshire creators believe that they lack legitimate claims to traditional labor rights, dismissing the need for fair compensation. For creators, the work is voluntary, and the platforms are beyond regulation. Gabriella asserts, "I don't think we have the right to earn the money on there just because [. . .] it's our choice to be creating that content." Sarah suggests that such atypical work diminishes the right to fair pay: "being paid to put food on Instagram is bizarre and [. . .] so wild. Why are you getting paid to do that?" Given this voluntary nature, C45 says, "[I]t doesn't feel like work, because I just enjoy doing it. If I stopped enjoying it, I'd just stop doing it." By not recognizing content creation as work, creators actively refrain from resisting material domination.

Creators reject the need for employment rights, rationalizing the lack of pay and formal recognition as workers, further facilitating non-resistance to material domination. Discussing creators' rights, Lisa states, "I presume I have [no rights] because I'm just working for myself [. . ..] I'm just getting a little bit of supplemental income. So, I don't earn enough." This active disavowal of worker status justifies the lack of employment rights. Similarly, C8 says, "I try to view it as a hobby so it doesn't really matter if I get paid or not . . .. [T]hat's my reward for myself, instead of the money." Brands also send creators free items and pay them to advertise products and services, which are required to do the job. Lisa feels "grateful" when companies use her content without permission or compensation: "I just find it flattering that they think my photo will help them sell that dress [. . .] I'm not aware of any rights."

Creators sympathize with brands in this emergent employer/employee dynamic in SME labor. For Hannah E., "[T]hat's just the way it is [. . .] I try not to blame [the advertisers]." Josephine says, "[I]f he could get me to do a real picture story for free, then yeah. Obviously, brands want to spend [. . .] as little money as possible. I can't blame them." Creators like IAmJennyChat stress the need for balance

when approaching fair compensation: "[Brands] need to adequately compensate you for your time but you also need to adequately compensate them for the offer that's there."

Creators accept that tenuous worker rights are contingent upon follower counts, arguably internalizing the Darwinian logic inherent in the SME industry. C45 states, "I've not got a huge following at the minute, so I can understand why businesses aren't going to fork out however much to pay me." Similarly, Gabriella says, "[B]ecause my following is not too big [. . .] I don't think I deserve as much as someone who was bringing a lot of engagement to the platform." This prevailing belief that links a creator's value to their engagement metrics elucidates another aspect of non-resistance to material domination.

In addition, creators are apprehensive about formalizing their status as workers and demanding certain rights. They believe that the SME industry would dissolve, limiting their chances of getting paid or creating. Lisa would feel "restricted" by joining a collective organization to help secure such material gains: "[If having rights] would mean the people would be less likely to use influencers for advertising because there are certain things in place that you have to pay them this much, then I wouldn't like the idea." C40 further addresses the perceived allure of "[digital media] being unregulated and free": "It's also why people can be underpaid or be exploited for their content [. . .] I don't know how a body would regulate that or if they even should." These perspectives underscore creators' key dilemmas in the SME industry in which their non-resistance practices perpetuate the status quo, deeming non-payment and gifting sufficient and a need to sympathize with brands.

### Individual E-resistance

This subsection outlines interviewees' individual e-resistance practices: particular creators' personal, covert, and anonymous oppositional attempts to gain small wins to counter material, status, or ideological domination. Addressing material and status domination, individual hidden e-resistance practices inadvertently uphold a neoliberal individualist ideology. Such individual e-resistance attempts to counter familiar issues: pay, working hours, mental strain, algorithmic discrimination, and online abuse. Creators feel individually responsible to overcome these challenges without relying on assistance from platforms, brands, or collective representation.

Creators perceive overwork, working more, as both an object of resistance and an individual e-resistance practice against material domination. They describe the long hours involved in content creation and how non-work time is eroded, creating content while on holiday, eating, or during nights out. Creators feel responsible for managing these working conditions. Rachel O. states,

> [Y]ou never really switch off, which is difficult because your phone's always there and you've always got work on it. So, I

had to, a few years ago, just turn off all notifications on my phone [. . .] I don't want to see it unless I'm dedicating a specific part of my day to it.

Similarly, John and Becky recalled creating content during a holiday: "[W]e had to do a lot . . .. We felt like we had to do it." They instituted "a rule": "evenings are always ours . . . [W]e don't take the camera out."

For creators like Sarah, creating content itself is the solution to overwork: "I don't think it's [brands'] responsibility to make sure that you're not working too much." Sarah manages the pressure to create content in ways that can lift her spirits, especially as "one of the only Black content creators here":

> I'll try and shape the weeks and the work that I do so that's helping my mental health . . .. I'll try and create content that excites me and makes me a bit more motivated . . .. [T]his is the reality of the world and it's not great. How can I flip that to show that there are positives?

Blocking off and managing time demonstrates individual attempts to oppose the blurring of work and leisure time. These challenges can be magnified, disproportionately affecting other creators of color. Addressing her content being less visible, Black creator Josephine says, "I don't even know how to approach it [.. . .] What can I do to?" The sense of personal responsibility to manage difficult working conditions creates an illusion that individual creators can overcome these challenges alone.

Creators also foreground their individual e-resistance to status domination; they express a duty to their followers, rejecting advertising offers on ethical grounds. C25 valorizes the individual creator and their audience when deciding which brands to endorse: "I'll always be very responsible about what I promote online [. . ..] I won't just promote any old crap because I respect people." C9 only promotes products that are "aligned more with my morals." Rachel T. explains how financial hardship pushes creators to advertise brands: "people need money in the bank so unfortunately, that's what they do . . .. [E]ven if I needed money in the bank, I couldn't do something against my principles." While these creators recognize that companies share responsibility, individual creators are still expected to accept most of the burden of moral responsibility. This approach fosters the illusion that individual creators can easily oppose status challenges alone.

Online abuse is also pervasive, especially for creators of color or women, prompting creators to employ individual hidden e-resistance to status domination. Creators filter out, delete, or ignore comments, or block accounts. C45 recounts facing "degrading" and "creepy" comments from men on her posts and "set up restrictions on certain words, and then certain accounts and comments [.. . .] And then any direct messages, they're filtered into requests and that's got a filter on

particular words [. . ..] I do use the block button quite a lot." Similarly, C2 "micromanage[s] the comments" to eliminate "verbally negative or harassment wise or racial" content. IAmJennyChat highlights the platform's attentional imperative, as responding to sexual comments from men can importantly perpetuate a "cycle" of attention: "But then with the algorithms, the more people comment and then the more you engage with them, the further your video goes, which then attracted more comments." Chloe T. has also received sexualized requests for content, concluding, "I think sharing your life on social media in general, you're going to have to set those boundaries and limits."

The burden of managing online abuse falls on individuals, often within a context of toxic positivity. C8 acknowledges these challenges:

> [T]he hate comments I get, I try to block them, delete them, but they make another account [. . ..] I just see it in a better light. If they do put a comment about being racist to me, it's more like they're embarrassing themself.

Conversely, Rachel O. details a "relentless" attack from other creators: "I had to take some time off YouTube. . . . [I]t really affected my mental health [. . ..] But it's hard because to some extent, creating has made me stronger overall. I can cope with more stuff now." Creators' individual hidden e-resistance practices in countering status and material domination issues encapsulate a paradoxical struggle. As creators assert their individual agency to navigate challenges, they perpetuate neoliberal individualism in the SME industry.

## Collective E-resistance

This subsection outlines Yorkshire creators' multifaceted collective hidden and public e-resistance responses to material and status domination, illuminating counter-ideologies of communitarianism and collective individualism. These e-resistance practices address struggles over pay, online abuse, professionalization opportunities, and visibility of creators with historically marginalized social identities.

Creators actively participate in collective hidden e-resistance to material domination, including private social media groups, sharing compensation information. Luiza highlighted a recurring question in creator Facebook groups: "How much should I charge?" Creator Pippa joined a WhatsApp group within the disabled community to address pay transparency "so we can check there's no discrepancies." Jim emphasized the significance of the pay "talk" in "dad blogger groups" to help creators protect themselves against unpaid work. These efforts reflect creators' collective efforts to navigate the challenges of determining appropriate remuneration.

Other creators participate in collective hidden e-resistance, anonymously launching social media hashtag campaigns to address non-payment. Rebecca used a brand's hashtag to locate other creators on Instagram after the company failed to compensate them for completed work. Once united, the creators pressured the brand through a collective email: "We're aware of what's happening. We're not stupid. We found each other. And if you don't pay us, we're going to add late fees. And every day that you don't pay, the fee goes up." The brand eventually paid these creators, illustrating the power of collective e-resistance to material domination.

Regarding collective public e-resistance, creators highlight social media accounts dedicated to pay information and professional support. Laura referenced an account that calls out brands for non-payment, encouraging creators to discuss fair pay rates. Similarly, Rebecca recalled an Instagram account exposing the brand pay disparity between Black and White creators and took collective action: "This isn't fair. There's got to be something that can be done. That we are all treated equally because this is not okay." Going beyond these issues, Chikumo contributed to ExcludedUK's community-building and welfare initiatives through shared public information over its social media accounts in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. For Chikumo, the group facilitated a sense of shared struggle and mutual aid: "This group was created to basically say, 'We're all in the same position. We can't even get universal credit [. . ..] And it's just a group of people that have helped each other out.'" These collective e-resistance practices embody and promote a counter-ideology of communitarianism among creators.

Some collective hidden e-resistance practices targeting status domination exhibit a counter-ideology of collective individualism. Certain creators receive support from platforms, establishing individualized connections to enhance their professional status. Marissa and Gabrielle receive monthly email invitations to book calls with YouTube representatives, fostering direct communication with staff to "voice your opinions, suggestions." C2 has established an email contact at YouTube, assisting them in navigating the platform's terms and conditions: "I think it's important to establish a connection with someone [. . .] who I can email, and they'll be very helpful if I have questions." Creators like Gabriella highlight the benefits of the YouTube Black Voices program, underscoring that "inclusive" initiatives create "opportunities to get to know the people that work at these platforms, have their say, and learn, as well just to maybe improve their content. So, they have better chances of going viral." These instances of receiving personalized support from platforms exemplify the collective individualistic approach.

Conversely, creators seek community members' or organizations' support to address professionalization issues. Hannah K. initially turned to experienced "older" creator friends for their wisdom. They made her feel "looked after," educated in content production, and empowered to engage confidently with brands while mitigating the risks of potential exploitation. When contemplating the role of collective professional bodies in supporting creators, C38 emphasized,

"[Social media agencies and management companies] actually are doing good stuff and trying to get people paired and get people good jobs." These examples also foreground a collective individualistic approach to navigating professionalization dynamics.

Some creators noted that receiving management or accounting support reduces exploitation. C15 recalled, "[I]f I didn't have a YouTube manager that I trusted, I probably would've been taken advantage of. I had a few jobs at the very start where they paid me nothing for a lot of work." C40 also shared her experiences of working with a brand manager to "try and get some help" in negotiating brand deals. Similarly, Josephine feels empowered by paying an accountant to help manage her self-employment business. Other creators have a social media team or "at least one person taking care of [their] social media, just responding," said Luiza. "You need a team."

Creators also adopt collective hidden or public e-resistance practices, forming communities to resist online abuse. Rachel O. recalled the case of audience members who reported creators sharing homophobic and transphobic content to a brand. In response, the brand ceased working with those creators: "You don't actually want them getting paid for that. You don't want to reward that." Jordan describes how community members and administrators kick people out of livestreams for making hateful comments to keep streams positive: They "monitor" hate speech and police bad behavior." C45 similarly describes how women in the community look out for each other; if one account is harassing somebody, they all report or block that account. Deon has supported creators going through hard times partially to resist Twitch hate raids against people from historically marginalized backgrounds, suggesting that grassroots communities can help creators cope: "my community is my little family." These collective e-resistance practices further foster a communitarianism counter-ideology.

Collective public e-resistance practices addressing status domination, particularly underrepresentation, exhibit both communitarian and collective individualistic counter-ideologies. Interviewees recounted social media accounts posting about the invisibility of creators from historically marginalized backgrounds to raise awareness and challenge stereotypes. Gabriella observes that "a lot of Black creators were not getting pushed out" compared to "white people on their [TikTok] For You pages."

Furthermore, creators discussed the alternative online communities they have helped create around particular content types and social identities. Pippa creates disability and chronic illness content because it offers them a "sense of community" and "purpose": "Social media [. . .] gives a voice to people who don't always necessarily have a voice in the [mainstream] media." Similarly, Chloe T. creates content to narrate her experiences, connect with others who have cerebral palsy, "raise awareness," be relatable to younger people, provide a "support network," and "normalize disability within society." For Pippa, community

members' experiences have been a useful alternative to medical professionals' advice: "having the autonomy to create that narrative yourself on social media in a way that other people can find you and engage with you, that's one of the best things about it for me." Creators have also forged online communities around alternative social media content by and for older women. C18 bemoans that middle-aged women like her have not had "a voice" in traditional media: "there's a whole army of [. . .] over 40 and over 50 women out there who like to see what other women are wearing and they message me."

Creators further game algorithms to resist individualistic pursuits of visibility. For Lisa, this practice involves creators regularly commenting on each other's posts to boost engagement and garner "likes": "It feels like an unwritten rule that you support each other." Community is central to facilitating collective resistance and shaping creators' success. Lewis affirms, "Being a creator means [. . .] literally it's about the community . . .. [I]f you are just seeing other creators as competitors, you're not promoting a positive community and never mind a community at all."

These collective e-resistance practices among creators encapsulate a tension between communitarian and collective individualistic counter-ideologies. As creators navigate this delicate balance and develop alternative communities, they actively shape the SME industry, illuminating the multifaceted nature of resistance.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Through a creator workers' inquiry, our research contributes a multifaceted understanding of the interplay among domination practices and various forms of non-resistance and e-resistance. While material domination was central (Abidin, 2016; Poell et al., 2022), our findings illuminate additional issues underexamined in previous research, including an able-bodied and *regional* (digital) divide (Johnson, 2019). In addition, status domination issues were pervasive, with Yorkshire nano-influencers facing additional hurdles underexplored in extant research, including inequitable access to professional training resources (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Healy, 2022). Based on our typology, individual e-resistance tactics tend to be hidden. Regarding material domination, creators reframe the always-on culture of overwork (Abidin, 2016; Poell et al., 2022) to improve their subjective wellbeing. In resisting status domination, creators selectively reject brand collaborations to maintain accountability to their communities (Baym, 2015; E. J. Zhao, 2016). They also selectively ignore abusive content, akin to deliberately overlooking certain account metrics (Christin & Lewis, 2021). However, these responses perpetuate ideological domination, reinforcing the entrepreneurial imperative within the SME industry (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022; Soriano et al., 2021). Creators negotiate resistance and conformity within a neoliberal framework of individual empowerment and self-realization.

Creators also engage in collective hidden and public e-resistance. To resist material domination, they share pay details within social media communities and initiate hashtag campaigns to expose brand non-payment, resembling collective gossip (Bishop, 2019; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024) and digital labor solidarity (Soriano et al., 2021). Furthermore, they resist status domination, seeking professional support, and taking a stand against abusive behavior.

These collective hidden e-resistance practices contribute to ideological resistance, fostering alternative creator communities and communitarian or collective individualist counter-ideologies (Bonini & Treré, 2024). Their relational labor extends beyond the boundaries associated with communtainment (E. J. Zhao, 2016), echoing other instances of digital solidarity communities (Meisner, 2023; Soriano et al., 2021; Wood, 2021). Yet, we highlight examples with a collective and enduring focus, extending beyond the scope of previous research (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; X. Zhao & Abidin, 2023). Yorkshire creators still perpetuate an entrepreneurial spirit, managing challenges without disrupting precarious conditions or local systemic inequities (Soriano et al., 2021).

Yorkshire creators' collective public e-resistance highlights novel practices regarding status domination. They strategically game algorithms to enhance each other's visibility, similar to small-scale influencer engagement pods (Bonini & Treré, 2024; O'Meara, 2019). Their public e-resistance promotes a communitarian counter-ideology, emphasizing mutual support. While they may not explicitly seek radical political change, like left-wing BreadTubers (Cotter, 2024; Kuznetsov & Ismangil, 2020), they commit to collectivism. In addition to foregrounding the experiences of historically marginalized creators (Sobande et al., 2020), Yorkshire creators educate audiences, reshape narratives, and challenge prevailing stereotypes about disabled and/or middle-aged female creators, aspects underexplored in previous research.

Furthermore, our research modifies the resistance concept. Rather than narrowly focusing on the domination-resistance binary (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Mumby et al., 2017; Scott, 1990) or domination mainly as extensions of creators' precarious neoliberal labor (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy & Sawey, 2021), we develop the novel category of non-resistance. Non-resistance captures how creators actively *do not contest* issues while perpetuating domination and self-exploitation. Creators exhibit non-resistance regarding material issues, understanding it as a hobby rather than work. We also identify additional material domination issues that sustain non-resistance. Some creators do not believe they are entitled to employment rights, including fair payment and working conditions. Such non-resistance to material domination perpetuates ideological domination.

Our study also highlights creators' distinct challenges and digitally-mediated resistance practices in SME, including online insults, attacks on dignity, and algorithmic hierarchies (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Mumby et al., 2017; Scott,

1990). These challenges are shaped by conditions within a peripheral region; racial, gendered, ageist, and able-bodied platform capitalism; and neoliberal individualism (Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021; Johnson, 2019; Salamon, 2023b; Sobande et al., 2020; Srnicek, 2017). In navigating these adversities, Yorkshire creators' public e-resistance practices capitalize on the internet's technological and social affordances (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Mumby et al., 2017; Salamon, 2023a). These practices manifest in various forms, including call-out campaigns, boycotts, and critical exposés of platform companies and brands, becoming creators' *digital* "public assertion of worth" (Scott, 1990, p. 198). They articulate communitarian and collective individualist counter-ideologies. Creators' hidden e-resistance practices involve subverting industry standards for individual gain, gossiping, and assertively communicating their worth (Bishop, 2019). By cultivating online autonomous social spaces (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Mumby et al., 2017; Salamon, 2023a), creators also foster alternative communities, temporarily challenging established norms (Scott, 1990). This interplay between domination and e-resistance underscores how creators are adaptable and resilient due to systemic challenges.

Overall, we found that individual creators navigate a spectrum of e-resistance forms and practices, sometimes adopting non-resistance and, at other times, embracing individual, collective, public, and/or hidden resistance. E-resistance operates along a "continuum," influenced by creators' "everyday" experiences; varying levels of cultural, economic, or social capital; and changing awareness of their domination (Bonini & Treré, 2024, p. 21). Creators' evolving circumstances impact the resources available to them and shape their responses to domination issues: "platform power and individual agency are continuously renegotiated" (Bonini & Treré, 2024, p. 57). Although a particular e-resistance act typically responds to a specific domination practice, it can sometimes impact other domination practices. For instance, blocking off time is primarily a response to material domination because it enables creators to manage their workload and minimize burnout. Yet, this act can also impact status domination. By dedicating more time to produce higher-quality content, creators can improve their self-branding and professional practices, potentially enhancing their status within the SME industry. Notably, a creator's number of followers did not significantly affect their tendency to engage in non-resistance, public forms of e-resistance, or collective e-resistance. However, social backgrounds often considerably shape creators' e-resistance practices. Our research suggests that creators of color, female, disabled, and/or younger creators tend to adopt collective public e-resistance forms, building digital solidarity communities around their marginalized identities and experiences to contest visibility issues (Meisner, 2023; Sobande et al., 2020; Soriano et al., 2021). Conversely, they tend to engage in collective hidden e-resistance around professionalization issues, possibly to maintain stable relationships with platforms and

brands, secure income, and minimize the online abuse and marginalization they already face.

Some creators' acts of individual or collective e-resistance contribute to small victories (Bonini & Treré, 2024; Mumby et al., 2017), but they ultimately fail to challenge the overarching power structures and neoliberal values of platform capitalism. E-resistance acts typically address grievances over immediate issues, such as launching hashtag campaigns against non-payment or ignoring abusive comments online. While they may result in short-term relief and empowerment, they do not radically alter systemic issues, like algorithmic discrimination, low monetization rates, online abuse, or hierarchical platform governance structures. In addition, certain acts of collective e-resistance may facilitate digital solidarity communities, like online support groups and a communitarian counter-ideology (Soriano et al., 2021). However, these e-resistance practices typically operate within the platform's moral economy and are often ephemeral (Bonini & Treré, 2024), limiting their potential to challenge power relations and foster long-term change toward a creator-controlled economy.

Finally, our study raises implications for future research. Researchers could apply our creator workers' inquiry and typology of domination and e-resistance, examining online workers in other contexts, different e-resistance practices, and cross-national resistance actions (Meisner, 2023; Vandaele, 2021). Extending a creator workers' inquiry (Englert et al., 2020; Marx, 1880/1938; Salamon, 2020), researchers could conduct a class composition analysis to better understand the material structuring and consequences of domination, non-resistance, e-resistance, and offline resistance. By understanding the relationships between domination and e-resistance, researchers could better examine the political economy of digital labor and how workers actively shape it.

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