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From performance to exhaustion: Burnout and precariousness in the Post-Digital Creator Economy

*Do desempenho à exaustão: Burnout e precarização na Creator Economy Pós-Digital**Del desempeño al agotamiento: Burnout y precarización en la Creator Economy Posdigital*

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Abstract

The present study aims to understand how Burnout Syndrome, manifested as exhaustion and occupational stress, impacts the Creator Economy and affects new generations. The research deepens the analysis of the performance crisis amidst intense technological changes in work, which affect the subjectivity and the commodified identity construction of young creators. Burnout is articulated as a symptom of digital techno-neoliberal capitalism, establishing a dialogue with Brazilian structural issues, such as the precariousness of *Pejotization* and the logic of the *Gig Economy*. The methodology consists of an exploratory bibliographic review that supports the theoretical framework. The focus resides on the contribution to the field of Communication, through the examination of market transformations, algorithmic management, and the incessant pursuit of professional relevance.

Keywords: Burnout; creator economy; post-digital era employment; media consumption and production; identity.

Resumo

O presente estudo objetiva compreender como a Síndrome de Burnout, manifestada como estafa e estresse ocupacional, impacta a *Creator Economy* e se manifesta entre as novas gerações. A pesquisa aprofunda a análise da crise do desempenho em um cenário de intensas transformações tecnológicas no trabalho, que afetam a subjetividade e a construção identitária mercantilizada de jovens criadores. O *burnout* é articulado como sintoma do capitalismo tecno-neoliberal digital, estabelecendo um diálogo com questões estruturais brasileiras, como a precarização da *pejotização* e a lógica da *Gig Economy*. A metodologia consiste em uma revisão bibliográfica exploratória que fundamenta o aporte teórico. O foco reside na contribuição ao campo da Comunicação, por meio do exame das transformações do mercado, da gestão algorítmica e da busca incessante por relevância profissional.

Palavras-chave: Burnout; *creator economy*; emprego na era pós-digital; consumo e produção midiáticos; identidade.



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Resumen

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo comprender cómo el Síndrome de Burnout, manifestado como agotamiento y estrés ocupacional, impacta la *Creator Economy* y se manifiesta en las nuevas generaciones. La investigación profundiza el análisis de la crisis del desempeño en un escenario de intensas transformaciones tecnológicas en el trabajo, que afectan la subjetividad y la construcción identitaria mercantilizada de jóvenes creadores. El *burnout* se articula como síntoma del capitalismo tecno-neoliberal digital, estableciendo un diálogo con cuestiones estructurales brasileñas, como la precarización de la *Pejotização* y la lógica de la *Gig Economy*. La metodología consiste en una revisión bibliográfica exploratoria que fundamenta el aporte teórico. El foco reside en la contribución al campo de la Comunicación, mediante el examen de las transformaciones del mercado, la gestión algorítmica y la incesante búsqueda de relevancia profesional.

Palabras clave: Burnout; creator economy; empleo en la era posdigital; consumo y producción mediática; identidad.

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Introduction

The intersection of Burnout Syndrome and the Creator Economy in the post-digital era is a complex phenomenon that shapes the identity construction of digital influencers. The Creator Economy, an ecosystem in which content creators monetise their productions, was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the entry of Generation Z into the labour market. This group prefers creative roles to traditional jobs but faces unique challenges, including exhaustion exacerbated by hyper exposure and productivity demands (Aytac; Pehlivan, 2020).

The concept of the performance society, characterised by an excess of positivity and the incessant pursuit of success, implies consequences for mental health in this context. The transition to a performance society, according to Han, emphasises self-entrepreneurship and the transformation of the individual into their own product. This cultural shift is exemplified in the Creator Economy, where the need to continuously produce and monetise content overrides mental well-being (Dias; Rocha, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated this scenario, influencing economic structures and mental health, and is associated with an increase in depressive symptoms (Park et al., 2024). Digital influencers were pressured to meet growing content demands while navigating the pandemic's impact on economic and psychological stability.

Investigating this theme is necessary, anchored in the observation of transformations in the communication market and in the difficulties of maintaining professional relevance in a scenario dominated by international monopolies and information overload. Identifying the problem is fundamental to understanding its causes and effects and can serve as a reference for those experiencing symptoms in a context that transforms people into products. Therefore, the general objective of this work is to understand how Burnout Syndrome affects the Creator Economy and manifests among new generations, shaping the identity construction of young workers in the post-digital era. Specifically, it seeks to: (i) analyse how contemporary productive dynamics relate to malaise and which types of social, political, or economic projects they serve; (ii) examine the speed of contemporary relationships governed by smartphones, globalisation, content production, and hyper exposure; and (iii) identify theoretical-practical reflections on cancel culture and its effects on influencers.

Methodology

The present study is based on an exploratory bibliographic review that aims to establish a critical, multidisciplinary perspective on burnout in the Creator Economy. This approach is justified for mapping the dynamics of exhaustion, understood as a structural issue inherent to digital platforms and the labour market, overcoming the view focused on individual failure (Caminhas, 2024). The theoretical framework draws on insights from philosophy, social psychology, communication, and digital culture, enabling analysis of the work's conceptual pillars. Initially, burnout is conceptualised as a triad of exhaustion, depersonalisation, and diminished personal accomplishment (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Perlman & Hartman, 1982). Subsequently, the analysis deepens into the influence of algorithmic management, which, although conferring a certain autonomy, contributes to job insecurity (Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2024; Peng et al., 2024), and into applicable theoretical models, such as Self-Determination Theory and the Job Demands-Resources Model (Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2024; Peng et al., 2024). Finally, the discussion is anchored in the Brazilian reality, examining how *Pejotization* and the Gig Economy reinforce the structural precariousness of work (Caminhas, 2024). The research is theoretical and does not involve empirical investigation.

Burnout Syndrome: the burnout society

The term Burnout Syndrome, proposed by Freudenberg (1974), describes a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion resulting from chronic occupational stress. The phenomenon is typically characterised by three central dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (or cynicism), and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Recognised as a condition directly related to work by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), the syndrome extends beyond individual health and constitutes a complex social and organisational issue, with direct impacts on productivity and labour dynamics.

Several risk factors contribute to the development of the syndrome, including high workloads and a discrepancy between expectations and job requirements (Prem, 2022). Additionally, emotional labour requires maintaining a specific expression, which often results in wear and tear (Ivancevic; Ivanovic, 2022). The resurgence of interest in the topic is, in part, associated with the Millennial generation, for whom problematic internet use is identified as a significant risk factor (Mao et al., 2024).



The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the prevalence of burnout and depression (Lin et al., 2021). This context reinforces Han's (2017) analysis of the achievement society, in which self-exploitation occurs under the guise of freedom, generating a paradox in which the individual is simultaneously an exploiter and an exploited. This dynamic is particularly evident in the Creator Economy, where hyper exposure and the mental productive load lead to exhaustion. Scientific literature points to a strong correlation between burnout and depression (Veltyshev et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2025). To combat burnout, prevention strategies that promote healthier work environments and mitigate the deleterious effects of the achievement society are fundamental (França et al., 2014).

The context of work in the Post-Digital Era: precariousness and the NEET Generation

Vulnerability to unemployment and precariousness disproportionately affects the Millennial and Z generations. Formed amid successive economic crises, these cohorts have developed a new relationship with work. The precariousness of autonomy and flexibility relative to the stability offered by conventional careers is observed (Antunes et al., 2022). Adherence to the Gig Economy and, subsequently, to the Creator Economy, is perceived as a cultural and strategic response to a scenario of scarce formal opportunities. Such a phenomenon is conceptualised by Abílio (2020) as the real subsumption of the hustle to digital logic.

The Creator Economy in Brazil is deeply intertwined with the country's socioeconomic challenges, particularly economic instability and high youth unemployment. Such factors drive young Brazilians toward the platform economy, which is seen as a strategic necessity for subsistence and professional relevance (Machado, 2001; Baltar & Krein, 2013). This scenario is exacerbated by the consolidation of Pejotization, a practice that classifies workers as independent contractors. This practice shifts the activity's risks and costs directly to the individual, intensifying labour precariousness (Baltar & Krein, 2013). Employment precarity is a hallmark of the platform economy, characterised by the absence of social protections, exacerbated by the constant pressures of algorithmic management and the demand for self-promotion (Alauddin et al., 2024; Caminhas, 2024). Consequently, exhaustion is common. The need to continuously produce content to maintain visibility and income, in an environment that typically rewards only a high-performing minority, exacerbates self-exploitation and burnout. This condition indicates that exhaustion transcends individual failure, revealing itself as a symptom of the market's structural precariousness (Caminhas, 2024; Scott & Woods, 2024; Verwiebe et al., 2025).

The Gig Economy is a labour market characterised by temporary professionals without an employment bond (Crary, 2016; Abílio, 2019). This structure was intensified in Brazil by the COVID-19 pandemic, which accentuated youth unemployment, leading to the expansion of informal work (Costa, 2020; Nazzari; Silva, 2023). In the national context, the model manifests as Pejotization, an independent hiring model that, although it offers autonomy, imposes high economic volatility. Precariousness is consolidated through the transfer of risks and costs to individuals, exposing workers to labour instability (Abílio, 2019; Abílio, 2020; Auguste et al., 2023).

The impact of this model on young people is notable, affecting their financial and psychological well-being. On the psychological plane, job insecurity, pressure for performance, and social isolation can generate suffering (Glavin; Schieman, 2021). This dissolution of boundaries is a symptom of 24/7 capitalism, a regime in which human activity is incessantly captured by productive logic (Crary, 2016). For professionals in the creative economy, the model exposes them to global competition and emotional fatigue stemming from the need for continuous innovation and marketing (Ravenelle et al., 2022; Scott; Woods, 2024). The Creator Economy emerges, thus, as a career possibility that, although offering monetisation opportunities, intensifies the workload and the pressure for a constant online presence, establishing a direct connection between the precariousness of the Gig Economy and the exhaustion experienced by content creators (Rauber et al., 2021; Scott; Woods, 2024).

The Creator Economy as an epicenter: work dynamics and performance

The Creator Economy has emerged as a significant force in the digital landscape, transforming content production, distribution, and monetisation. This ecosystem is currently valued at over 104 billion dollars (Dahm; Heydenreich, 2023). Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok were fundamental to creators' ability to monetise their content (Ma et al., 2023).

This conjuncture gave rise to the concept of creative entrepreneurs, whose success is mediated by the dynamics of digital platforms, which employ algorithms and governance structures that influence visibility and monetisation opportunities (Edeling; Wies, 2024; Eisenbeis; Rinsdorf, 2024). In response, creators adopt multi-platform strategies (Ma et al., 2023), reflecting the culture of convergence and participation (Jenkins, 2008). The

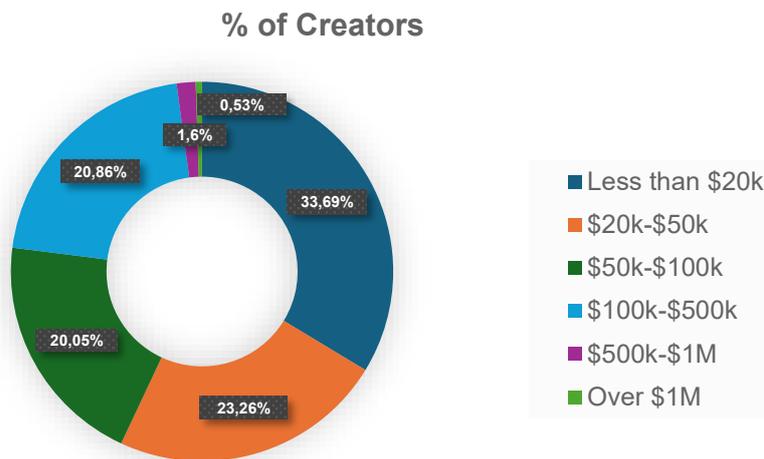


demand for constant engagement from an active audience intensifies productive pressure, blurring the boundary between producers and consumers.

Despite the market volume, the internal dynamics of this ecosystem reveal challenges. Income distribution is notably unequal (as shown in Chart 1), and market power is concentrated in a few platforms (as shown in Chart 2). Such information reinforces economic precarity and the need for continuous adaptation (Rieder et al., 2023). The fusion between personal and professional identities raises concerns about the commodification of individuality and the risk of exhaustion, connecting the vigour of this market to the central theme of burnout (Massaro, 2022). The Creator Economy has emerged as a significant force in the digital landscape, transforming content production, distribution, and monetisation. This ecosystem is currently valued at over 104 billion dollars (Dahm; Heydenreich, 2023). Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok were fundamental to creators' ability to monetise their content (Ma et al., 2023).

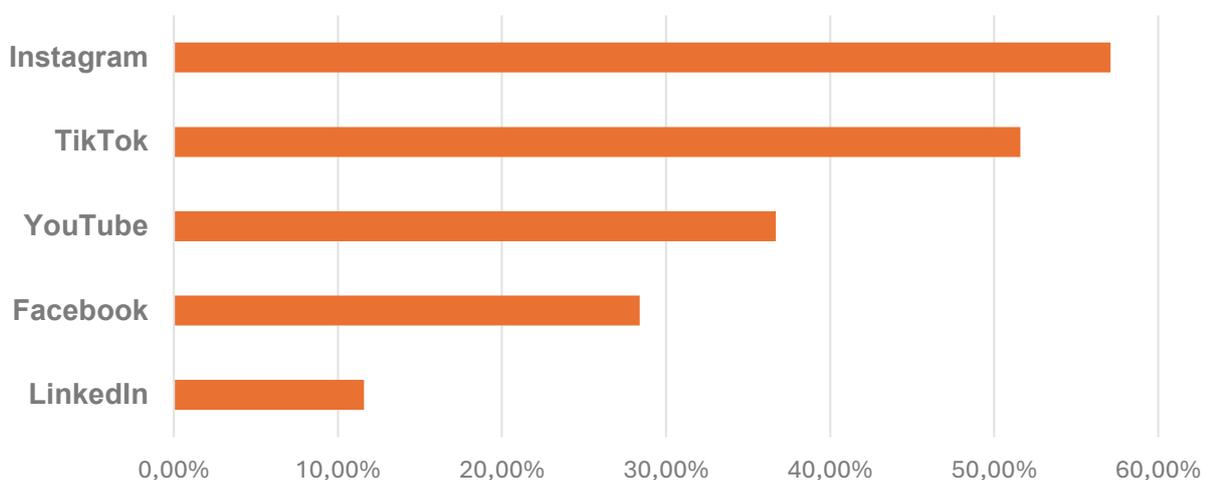
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Chart 1 - Income distribution



Source: Influencer Marketing Hub (2024)

Chart 2 - Main platform for Creators



Source: Influencer Marketing Hub (2025)



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The Creator Economy concentrates power in international monopolies. For the Communication professional, the central challenge is maintaining relevance in a supersaturated environment governed by the attention economy (Franck, 2019; Krieken, 2019). This incessant struggle for attention is mediated by the opaque algorithmic management of platforms. Algorithms not only dictate content distribution but also impose discipline on subjectivity and production frequency (Duffy & Meisner, 2022; Verwiebe et al., 2024). Consequently, content value is determined by opaque mechanisms, leading creators to perceive unpredictable control (Verwiebe et al., 2024). The psychological cost of this subordination manifests as algorithmic exhaustion and burnout (Duffy & Meisner, 2022). This condition reflects the conflict between the need for visibility inherent to Communication and the opacity of algorithmic regulation, ultimately representing the failure of the individual's capacity to remain relevant in an unequal control system (Duffy & Meisner, 2022; Omid, 2025).

Algorithmic management, which determines visibility and success, constitutes a significant source of stress. Such a mechanism leads creators into a continuous cycle of analysis and adaptation to maintain relevance (Thorne, 2023). This dynamic generates anxiety when trying to decipher opaque mechanisms (Albiez, 2022). The concept of algorithmic exhaustion describes the psychological cost of this engagement, which leads to dissatisfaction and burnout (Karhawi; Prazeres, 2022). The lack of transparency sustains a power differential, contributing to feelings of exploitation and insecurity (Frankovics, 2022; Choi et al., 2023).

Work intensity and precarization are other determining factors. The Creator Economy demands high productivity, with intense schedules and strict deadlines that, combined with instability, contribute to exhaustion (Deuze, 2023; Gregersen; Ormen, 2023). Studies indicate that the pressure to continuously produce new content aggravates the problem, and some creators have increased productivity by over 800% over a decade (Gregersen; Ormen, 2023). The creative process is frequently marked by involved labour, in which creators engage in complex and iterative production practices to obtain recognition, leading to emotional and physical fatigue (Scott; Woods, 2024).

This labour scenario is inserted into a cultural context of digital image massification. The rise of social media transformed content production by allowing users to become co-authors of their own narratives (Autenrieth, 2018). The selfie phenomenon, as a complex form of social interaction (Santos, 2015; Cipolletta, 2019), illustrates a culture of self-exposure that promotes an incessant search for validation, potentially exacerbating anxiety and feelings of inadequacy (Reichert, 2023). The confluence of these factors imposes challenges on mental health. The search for metrics, such as views and likes, can lead to a harmful fixation (Frankovics, 2022). Systemic issues of algorithmic pressure and labour intensity remain central challenges for career sustainability (Lukan & Zajc, 2024).

The individual as a product: narcissism, vigilantism, and the Transparency Society

The concept of the Self-As-Product in contemporary society is intrinsically linked to the rise of social media, which has become an essential platform for personal marketing and digital influence. The phenomenon is characterised by the transformation of individual identity into a marketable product, driven by the need for self-promotion and validation in a hyper-visible digital scenario (Groys, 2016). The culture of narcissism is evident in how individuals invest in their public image in pursuit of recognition (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Cenizo, 2021; Brailovskaia & Bierhoff, 2019). This dynamic establishes a complex interaction between entrepreneurship, the personal brand, and the psychological implications of constant self-exposure.

Social media platforms have become crucial tools for personal branding, blurring the boundaries between the creator and the product (Groys, 2016). The influencer phenomenon exemplifies this tendency to normalise self-promotion and self-exploitation as part of work (Gómez & Pascual, 2023). The incessant search for validation can create a vicious cycle that significantly affects mental health (Brailovskaia, 2024). Constant social comparison can lead to decreased self-esteem and increased anxiety and depression (Arigo et al., 2024). In this sense, the exhibitionist society, as described by Han, commodifies personal identity, which results in hypervisibility, self-exploitation, and, consequently, exhaustion (Han, 2017).

Driven by capitalist logics, platforms transform individuals into commodities by encouraging them to create personal brands (Németh, 2024). Although the Self-As-Product offers opportunities for entrepreneurship, the emphasis on self-promotion can lead to a fragmented conception of identity and a superficial understanding of

the self. Such a process highlights the risks associated with the commodification of subjectivity (Milivojević, 2014; Castaño, 2017).

The imperative of the Creator Economy requires young workers to adopt the logic of the Self-As-Product, resulting in a commodified identity construction that is intrinsically linked to the success of their brand. Consequently, identity is converted into a continuous performance and a capital asset, distancing itself from an internal process of self-knowledge. This transformation is driven by neoliberal norms that convert authenticity into a marketable strategy, a process termed “authenticization” (Plesa, 2023). Such dynamics tend to compromise the individual’s self-understanding and freedom, affecting mental health. The fusion between the authentic self and the brand-persona constitutes the genesis of vulnerability. Promotional work on social media requires building a distinct brand for each platform, which forces creators to balance personal authenticity with the demands of digital economies (Scolere et al., 2018). This makes identity performance strategic, but inherently vulnerable.

In this context, platforms impose specific skills and resort to algorithms and metrics as control mechanisms (Omidi, 2025). These mechanisms directly influence identity construction, reshaping creative work. Hyper-exposure and the incessant need for external validation, measured by volatile metrics, are fragile and subjective (Mears & Beauvais, 2025). Therefore, when brand performance fails, the collapse is perceived not only in the career dimension but also in the very existence of identity (Scolere et al., 2018). Burnout, in this framework, manifests as a symptom of the failure to sustain the idealised performative self-demanded by platform capitalism (Omidi, 2025; Sujon & Ntalla, 2025). This condition reflects the tension between creativity and the platform’s architecture of commodification.

The direct consequence is hypervisibility, characterised by the constant need to be seen and validated online, which can lead to superficial forms of self-exploitation (Abreu, 2016). Social networks exacerbate narcissistic tendencies, acting as platforms for self-promotion and the search for validation through engagement metrics (Buffardi; Campbell, 2008; Gnams; Appel, 2018).

Constant exposure transforms the digital environment into a panopticon, where users are observers and observed, creating a system of mutual surveillance (Allmer et al., 2013). This dynamic not only reinforces conformist behaviours but also creates the conditions for digital lynchings, a manifestation of the surveillance culture. The Transparency Society, as described by Han, accelerates the flow of information and commodifies all aspects of life, leading to the loss of otherness (Capella; Wenz, 2023). The voluntary sharing of personal information makes individuals vulnerable to big data analysis, which consolidates the commodification of experiences (Allmer et al., 2013). For Han, the reflective pause (contemplation and silence) is the counterpoint to combat the self-exploitation that leads to burnout (Capella; Wenz, 2023).

Final Considerations

The general objective of this work was to understand how Burnout Syndrome affects the Creator Economy and manifests among new generations, shaping the identity construction of young workers in the post-digital era. The analysis demonstrated that burnout, in this context, does not present itself as an isolated phenomenon, but as a symptomatic ailment of digital techno-neoliberal capitalism, aggravated by hyperconnectivity and contemporary acceleration.

The argumentation showed that labour precarization, systemic unemployment, and the consolidation of the Gig Economy created the conditions for the rise of the Creator Economy. The study delved into the dynamics of this ecosystem, revealing how algorithmic pressure and the demand for high productivity convert it into an epicentre of exhaustion. Subsequently, the analysis turned to psychosocial consequences, discussing the transformation of the individual into a Self-As-Product. It was verified that the need for continuous self-promotion, inserted in a culture of narcissism and vigilantism, weakens creators’ mental health. Such dynamics, which include the fear of disinformation and the consequences of cancelling, generate a crisis of trust and intensify the individual’s exhaustion in the digital ecosystem.

Thus, the research objectives were achieved by demonstrating that factors such as high competitiveness, dependence on advertising capitalism, narcissistic self-image, and structural labour precarization contribute to the deterioration of young people’s mental health in the Creator Economy. The main theoretical contribution of this work lies in articulating Byung-Chul Han’s thought with the material dynamics of this new market, arguing that burnout transcends individual failure and emerges as a political symptom of the performance society.

As a limitation, the exclusively theoretical-bibliographical character of this research is highlighted. For future research, conducting empirical investigations with content creators is suggested to deepen the understanding



of their subjective experiences. Even so, it is hoped that this analysis serves as a critical alert regarding the urgency of rethinking work and subjectivation models that shape the future in the post-digital era.

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