

Two Regimes of Valuation: Commercial Extraction and Administrative Devaluation in the Political Economy of Communication

Dua Rezim Penilaian: Ekstraksi Komersial dan Devaluasi Administratif dalam Ekonomi Politik Komunikasi

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Abstract

This article develops a critical political-economy analysis of how communicative work becomes economically and legally intelligible. It examines two empirical sites, a) the commercial political commentary of the American podcast Pod Save America (PSA) on Donald Trump's reciprocal tariff policy, and the prosecution of Indonesian videographer Amsal Christy Sitepu over village-profile videos produced under a digital-village program. Drawing on Vincent Mosco's political economy of communication, the article argues that the cases should not be treated as symmetrical outcomes of a single process. PSA demonstrates commodification, in which political critique is packaged and circulated through revenue-bearing media infrastructure that can convert content and audience attention into exchange value. The Amsal case reveals administrative devaluation, in which an audit-based valuation process reportedly failed to recognize creative conception, editing and narration as legitimate economic components of audiovisual production, thereby exposing creative labor to legal risk. The finding from this research revealed unequal regimes of valuation. Market actors may recognize communication in order to extract revenue, whereas bureaucratic actors may deny its legitimate value in order to discipline expenditure and define legal responsibility. The article therefore extends a critical reading of Mosco by placing commodification alongside the institutional politics of valuation, ideology, and resistance. It argues that the central question is not only whether communication is commodified, but who has the authority to define value, through which infrastructures, and with what consequences for workers, audiences, and public culture.

Kata Kunci: Creative labor; Critical paradigm; Desa commodification; Political Economy of Communication (PEC); Regimes of valuation

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengembangkan analisis ekonomi-politik kritis tentang bagaimana kerja komunikatif menjadi dapat dipahami secara ekonomi dan hukum. Artikel ini meneliti dua lokasi empiris, a) komentar politik komersial dari podcast Amerika Pod Save America (PSA) tentang kebijakan tarif timbal balik Donald Trump, dan penuntutan videografer Indonesia Amsal Christy Sitepu atas video profil desa yang diproduksi dalam program desa digital. Mengacu pada ekonomi politik komunikasi Vincent Mosco, artikel ini berpendapat bahwa kasus-kasus tersebut tidak boleh

diperlakukan sebagai hasil simetris dari satu proses tunggal. PSA menunjukkan komodifikasi, di mana kritik politik dikemas dan diedarkan melalui infrastruktur media yang menghasilkan pendapatan yang dapat mengubah konten dan perhatian audiens menjadi nilai tukar. Kasus Amsal mengungkapkan devaluasi administratif, di mana proses penilaian berbasis audit dilaporkan gagal mengenali konsepsi kreatif, penyuntingan, dan narasi sebagai komponen ekonomi yang sah dari produksi audiovisual, sehingga mengekspos tenaga kerja kreatif pada risiko hukum. Temuan dari penelitian ini mengungkapkan rezim penilaian yang tidak setara. Para pelaku pasar mungkin mengakui komunikasi untuk mengekstrak pendapatan, sedangkan para pelaku birokrasi mungkin menyangkal nilai sahnya untuk mendisiplinkan pengeluaran dan mendefinisikan tanggung jawab hukum. Artikel ini oleh karena itu memperluas pembacaan kritis terhadap Mosco dengan menempatkan komodifikasi di samping politik institusional penilaian, ideologi, dan perlawanan. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa pertanyaan utama bukan hanya apakah komunikasi dikomodifikasi, tetapi siapa yang memiliki otoritas untuk mendefinisikan nilai, melalui infrastruktur mana, dan dengan konsekuensi apa bagi pekerja, audiens, dan budaya publik.

Keywords: Ekonomi Politik Komunikasi (PEC); Komodifikasi desa; Paradigma kritis; Rezim penilaian; Tenaga kreatif

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has reconfigured not only how information circulates but also how institutions recognize its economic worth. Political commentary, village promotion, audiovisual creativity, and audience attention move through infrastructures that make some forms of communication exchangeable, measurable, and profitable, while rendering others marginal, suspect, or legally vulnerable. Vincent Mosco's political economy of communication (PEC) offers a durable vocabulary for examining this process because it directs attention to the social relations and power relations that organize the production, distribution, and consumption of communication resources. The critical issue is not simply whether a message has value, but who has the institutional authority to define value, which forms of labor are recognized, and how the resulting definition distributes benefit and risk.

Media-commodification research has usefully documented how corporations and platforms turn content,

audiences, and labor into marketable assets. Yet this emphasis can obscure a related problem where institutions also exercise power by withholding recognition from labor that has social and economic use. Mosco defines commodification specifically as the transformation of use value into exchange value. However, it should therefore not be used loosely to describe every form of dehumanization, exclusion, or bureaucratic misrecognition. This distinction is analytically productive. It allows the study to investigate market extraction and administrative devaluation as connected, but non-identical, mechanisms of power.

This paper takes up that problem through two empirical sites. The first is Pod Save America (PSA), a political podcast hosted by former Obama administration aides, whose commentary on Donald Trump's April 2025 reciprocal tariff policy was produced and distributed through a commercial, multiplatform media environment. The second is the prosecution of Amsal Christy Sitepu, director of CV Promise land, who

produced village-profile videos for approximately twenty villages in Karo Regency between 2020 and 2022 in support of digital-village and creative-economy objectives. Public reporting indicates that the case turned crucially on the audit treatment of intellectual components of the work where idea development, concept design, editing, and voice dubbing has zero as having no recognized value (Kamil, 2026; IBTimes.ID, 2026).

The cases are not intended as a conventional comparison between the United States and Indonesia in the practice of communication commodification products but those are complementary sites for analysing a single problem in the politics of valuation in contemporary communication. In the PSA case, political critique can be recognized as commercially valuable because it is formatted, distributed, and measured within infrastructures oriented toward audience attention and revenue. In the Amsal case, creative labor is exposed to administrative devaluation when audit categories refuse to recognize intellectual work as a legitimate component of price. The contrast is therefore not between profit and no profit, but between institutions that recognize value in order to extract it and institutions that deny recognized value through bureaucratic and legal authority.

This study does not treat the two cases as institutionally symmetrical, nor does it claim that they operate under identical legal or political-economy regime. Instead, this study adopts a contrastive comparative strategy. PSA and The Amsal Sitepu case are examined because both make communicative work subject to institutional valuation, while the criteria, authorities, and

consequences of valuation differ rather sharply. Therefore, this study does not seek to establish equivalence between market media and state audit. Rather, this study identifies a shared analytical problem on who has the authority to define the value of communication and traces how this problem is organised differently under commercial and bureaucratic legal regimes. Their divergence is therefore not a weakness of comparison, but the condition through which differential valuable from the case becomes visible.

The article's contribution is to bring Mosco's analysis of commodification into dialogue with a critical account of valuation, ideology, and institutional power. It asks how value claims are made, which actors can validate them, what material infrastructures make their decisions effective, and how the benefits and harms of those decisions are distributed. This approach avoids treating either political podcasting or village video production as neutral public interest communication. Both are embedded in historically specific relations among media organizations, platforms, audiences, state agencies, workers, and legal institutions.

2. Theoretical Framework

Mosco's (2009) political economy of communication studies the social relations, especially power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of communication resources. Its object is not merely the text or the audience but the institutional processes through which communication is produced, circulated, and valued. Mosco foregrounds processes rather than treating firms or governments as fixed objects: commodification, spatialization, and structuration are entry

points for studying changing social relations. This orientation is crucial here because the podcast episode and the village video are not self-contained texts; each is the visible outcome of labor, organizational authority, technological infrastructure, and contested definitions of value. Accordingly, this study treats the PSA episode and The Amsal case on village profile video not as self-contained texts, but as outcomes of wider relations among producers, platforms, audiences, state agencies, legal institution, and valuation practices.

For Mosco (2009), commodification is the transformation of use values into exchange values: the process through which products that meet individual or social needs become commodities valued through market exchange. In communication, this involves more than the sale of content. It includes the commodification of audiences, whose attention and propensity to consume are sold to advertisers, and of labor, whose skills and creativity are organized under conditions that permit the extraction of surplus value. Mosco further distinguishes commodification from commercialization.

Commercialization is narrower, referring specifically to the advertiser-audience relationship; commodification is broader, encompassing content, audience attention, labor, and the social relations of production. This distinction matters for PSA, where political discourse must be analysed together with the production and circulation of audience attention, rather than only through provocative wording or a single episode title.

For PSA, commodification must be examined beyond the provocative language of single episode. The relevant process in this study includes the

selection and framing of a political issue, its conversion into platform-ready content, its distribution process through commercial channels, and also the organisation of audience attention within a wider media business model. This makes the study possible to analyse political criticism as both a form of public discourse and a potentially revenue-bearing media product.

Spatialization concerns the institutional extension of power across space and time through communication technologies; structuration concerns the mutually constitutive relation between social structure and human agency. PSA's multiplatform circulation can be read as spatialization because it extends the reach and potential market of political content. The village-video case should not be described simply as spatialization in reverse. Rather, it shows that the attempt to connect local village identities, tourism, and small enterprises to wider digital publics is dependent on administrative infrastructures, procurement, audit, and law that also extend state power into the labor process. Structuration directs attention to how creators, village officials, auditors, prosecutors, courts, professional organizations, and publics reproduce or contest these conditions.

Spatialization is used in this study to explain on how PSA extends political content across multiple audio and video platforms. In The Amsal case, it explains how village-profile videos were intended to connect local economy potential, tourism and small enterprises (SMEs) to audiences beyond the village. Structuration is used to analyse the interaction among creative producers, village governments, auditors, prosecutors, courts, and public audiences. These concepts are not treated as separate

findings, but as supporting processes that can clarify how valuation is extended, institutionalised and contested.

Furthermore, this study therefore uses the term differential valuation rather than treating value denial as a reverse form of commodification. Commodification specifically names market recognition and conversion into exchange value. Administrative devaluation refers to the institutional refusal to recognize certain forms of creative labor as legitimate economic value. The two processes are related because both concern and depend on unequal authority over what communication is worth, and however they operate through different institutional mechanism.

They nevertheless have different immediate effects where commodification can generate revenue and extract surplus from labor and audiences, whereas administrative devaluation can remove the grounds for payment, credibility, and legal protection. Commercial recognition may enable the extraction of revenue from communication process, whereas administrative devaluation may remove the bases for payment, professional recognition, and even so legal protection. Administrative devaluation is not presented as a new subtype of commodification in Mosco's original formulation. However, it's a complementary concept that extends political-economy analysis to the bureaucratic and legal conditions under which value is recognised, reduced, or even refused.

3. Research Method

3.1. Design and Paradigm

This study employs a qualitative, critical, integrative multi-site design. A critical

paradigm treats social reality as historically constituted through political, economic, and cultural relations of power; it also treats knowledge claims as value-mediated rather than neutral. In this study, the method is dialogic and dialectical because it examines contradictions between institutional claims and lived social consequences where PSA's claim to political critique alongside commercial incentives to organize attention, and the Indonesian state's creative-economy agenda alongside an audit process that reportedly devalues creative labor. The aim is not to declare either case ideologically pure or impure, but to identify how material and symbolic arrangements make particular definitions of value appear natural. Furthermore, this study is not designed to compare the United States (USA) and Indonesia as equivalent national systems. Instead, it uses an integrative contrastive design on how the two cases are treated as distinct empirical sites that clarifies how different institutions organise the recognition, extraction, denial, and contestation of communicative value.

3.2 Data Sources

This study used two empirical sites inform the analysis which are a) The Pod Save America (PSA) episode "Trump Nosedives Economy With Insane Tariffs," including its title, framing, audiovisual performance, distribution channels, and Crooked Media's membership model, and b) the legal and public controversy surrounding Amsal Christy Sitepu's (The Amsal) production of village-profile videos in Karo Regency, including reported audit-based valuation, the prosecution, the court's acquittal, policy documents on village digitalisation and the creative economy, and public responses to the case.

The empirical corpus was assembled through purposive documentary selection. For the PSA case, the corpus consisted of: (1) the episode “Trump Nosedives Economy With Insane Tariffs,” including its title, audiovisual recording, and available transcript or platform description; (2) Crooked Media’s official Pod Save America page, used to identify its distribution through Spotify, YouTube, and (3) Crooked Media’s publicly available membership page, used to identify its paid-content model.

For the Amsal case, the corpus consisted of public reporting from several mass media distributions, reports and available legal material of the case. These documents were selected because they provide evidence about the project’s purpose, the reported valuation of creative work, the legal process, and the institutional responses to the case.

The study does not claim access to PSA’s advertising records, total revenue, platform analytics, or complete audit and procurement files unless these materials are specifically available in the corpus. Therefore, the analysis interprets publicly documented institutional arrangements rather than measuring total revenue, audience effects, or the full legal merits of the case.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed through a critical political-economy framework guided by Mosco (2009) and by the institutional and ideological insights developed in *Culture, Society and the Media*.

Analysis proceeded in five linked stages where (1) identifying value claims, or what each case presents as useful, valuable, public-serving, or economically legitimate; (2) mapping

value-defining institutions, including media firms, platforms, advertisers, audiences, procurement bodies, auditors, prosecutors, and courts; (3) tracing material infrastructures, such as distribution channels, revenue models, procurement rules, audit standards, and legal instruments; (4) examining labor, benefit, and risk who performs conception, production, editing, circulation, and audience work, and who receives revenue, recognition, payment, stigma, or legal exposure; and (5) interpreting ideological legitimation and resistance, including the categories that make arrangements appear natural and the actors who challenge them.

The two cases were then synthesized thematically rather than scored as equivalent national cases. The comparison was conducted at the level of valuation processes rather than by treating the two cases as equivalent national, legal, or institutional contexts.

3.4 Scope and Limitations

The analysis does not claim to measure PSA’s total revenue, audience effects, or the full legal merits of the Amsal case nor to establish a direct causal relationship between one episode’s rhetoric and financial return. Similarly, it does not claim to independently resolve every legal or accounting issue in the Amsal case. The analysis is limited to the documentary evidence available in the corpus and interprets how media, audit, and legal institutions publicly frame communicative value. Future research should examine procurement contracts, audit reports, court decisions, platform revenue arrangements, and interviews with creators, producers, state officials, and audiences.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Commercial Recognition and Extraction: PSA's Political Media Economy

Podcast consumption in the United States has grown considerably, creating an expanding environment for the circulation of political audio and video content (SiriusXM Media, 2026; Edison Research, 2026). Crooked Media offers paid membership that provides subscribers with access to exclusive political content and other member benefits. PSA's political communication is therefore situated within a media ecosystem where public commentary is circulated through infrastructures designed to build reach, sustain audience relations, and generate commercial support. Its critique cannot be understood solely as a public-interest intervention and it is also produced within political and economic arrangements that enable its circulation and monetization.

The relevant political-economic question is not whether criticism is genuine, but how critical discourse is organized so that it can circulate, attract attention, and potentially sustain a media enterprise. In Mosco's framework, content commodification concerns the transformation of communicative material into a product that can be circulated and exchanged. PSA's discussion of Trump's reciprocal tariff policy illustrates this process. A policy initially presented as an economic measure to protect domestic industry is reformulated as podcast content where it is selected, interpreted, titled, performed, and distributed through multiple platforms.

The episode title, "Trump Nosedives Economy With Insane Tariffs," and the hosts' sarcastic framing

of the policy are best understood as textual strategies within this infrastructure. Expressions such as "nosedives" and "insane," together with the joke about tariffs affecting uninhabited islands, condense an interpretation of economic policy into an affectively legible and shareable form. They may invite attention through conflict, humour, and moral clarity, but the analysis should not infer a direct revenue effect from rhetoric alone.

PSA frames the policy as unrealistic because reshoring production would require investment, factory construction, and supply-chain development that cannot occur immediately. The likely short-term effect, according to the hosts' argument, is an increased burden on USA's consumers. This critique may articulate a public concern, but its production and distribution within Crooked Media's commercial infrastructure also give it potential economic value.

The point of this section is not that PSA's criticism becomes invalid because it is commercial. Rather, political critique is simultaneously a democratic intervention and a media commodity. Its critical force is shaped by a commercial infrastructure that rewards circulation, audience attention, subscription potential, and platform visibility. This is the central tension through which PSA demonstrates commercial recognition and extraction.

Mosco's audience commodification sharpens this point. The commodity is not solely the episode in which audience attention, demographic desirability, subscription potential, and platform-visible engagement can also be organized as assets. This places PSA within a wider division of labor involving hosts, editors, production staff, distribution platforms, advertisers, and audiences. Spatialization

extends this process as the same political commentary is circulated across audio and video platforms, reaching publics beyond a single broadcast channel. Yet the ideological effect of the content cannot be reduced to ownership or revenue alone. As Culture, Society and the Media emphasizes, economic structures operate through professional practices, organizational routines, and the material forms of discourse. PSA's sarcasm may challenge governmental policy while simultaneously making that challenge more compatible with a competitive attention economy. The critical tension is thus between oppositional political speech and the commercial organization of its circulation.

4.2 Administrative Devaluation: Creative Labor, Audit, and Legal Risk

A different configuration appears in the Amsal Christy Sitepu case. Indonesia's village-digitalization and creative-economy agendas position digital communication, local representation, and intellectual creativity as potential resources for development (Komdigi, 2024; Nuranisah et al., 2025). Amsal's village-profile videos were intended to promote local economic potential, tourism, and micro, small, and medium enterprises. The videos can therefore be understood as attempts to spatialize local resources in which they use digital media to connect village identities and markets to audiences beyond the village. However, the possibility of such extension depended on public procurement, valuation procedures, and legal institutions. The production of village-profile videos should therefore be understood not only as the delivery of audiovisual products, but also as an

effort to extend the visibility of local communities through digital media.

In early 2026, public reporting describes a corruption prosecution tied to an alleged state loss of approximately 202 million rupiah and to an audit that assigned zero value to intellectual components of the project, including idea development, concept design, editing, and voice dubbing (IBTimes.ID, 2026; Kamil, 2026). The decisive critical question is not whether creative labor has value in the abstract. It is how the audit institution defined legitimate value, which evidentiary standards it accepted, and which forms of knowledge were excluded. This reported valuation did not merely concern the amount of payment. It raised a broader question about which forms of work could be recognised as legitimate components of audiovisual production. When an institutional valuation framework privileges readily measurable material inputs but fails to recognise conception, editing, or narration, it establishes a hierarchy between labour that is administratively visible and labour that is rendered invisible.

This process is more accurately described as administrative devaluation than as interrupted commodification. It has consequences beyond a disputed price: it can undermine a creator's claim to payment, professional credibility, and legal security. The audit's apparent neutrality is itself an ideological issue. Terms such as "state loss," "reasonable price," and "corruption" can make a historically specific valuation regime appear self-evident, even when it conflicts with state commitments to the creative economy. The legal outcome is important for the analysis. On 1 April 2026, the Corruption Court at the Medan District Court acquitted Amsal because

the primary and subsidiary charges were not proven. The acquittal differed from the prosecution's request for two years' imprisonment, a Rp50 million fine, and repayment of Rp202,161,980 (Prasetyo, 2026). The acquittal does not itself establish the correct market price of Amsal's work. However, it demonstrates that the prosecution's construction of state loss and criminal responsibility was not sufficiently proven in court.

Administrative devaluation therefore refers not simply to a low price, but to a conflict over institutional authority about who may define legitimate value, what evidence counts, and how an economic disagreement can become a source of legal vulnerability. The case therefore demonstrates a contradiction within state power where the state promotes creativity and digital village development at the policy level while a local audit and legal apparatus may treat the intellectual labor required by those projects as economically illegible. This form of uncertainty may create a potential chilling effect for local creative workers when ordinary questions of pricing, creative judgement, and intellectual labour can be translated into allegations of financial loss or legal wrongdoing.

4.3 Differential Valuation, Ideology, and Resistance

The two cases reveal not two symmetrical outcomes but two regimes of valuation. The comparison is integrated at the level of the analytical problem, not at the level of institutional equivalence. PSA and the Amsal Sitepu case operate under different legal jurisdictions, organisational structures, and political-economic logics. However, both demonstrate that communicative value does not exist naturally in a

message or a video. Value is institutionally produced through authorised criteria of recognition. In PSA, commercial media logic recognises political commentary because audience attention, circulation, and subscription potential can be connected to revenue. In the Amsal case, bureaucratic-legal logic reportedly failed to recognise intellectual labour as a compensable component of public expenditure.

The comparison becomes more critical when ideology is included. The PSA episode can make a particular political interpretation feel immediate and commonsensical through provocation, sarcasm, and platform-ready circulation. The audit process can make a particular definition of “**real**” cost feel neutral by translating creative work into accounting categories that omit it. In the paradigm of culture, society and the media cautions against treating either media content or ideology as a simple reflection of economic structure. The relevant mechanisms include ownership and revenue, but also organizational routines, professional ideology, relations with sources and state institutions, and the material forms through which meaning is produced. The study therefore reads both commercial engagement and bureaucratic accounting as practices that organize meaning as well as resources.

This framework also clarifies resistance. PSA audiences are not simply passive commodities but they may interpret, reject, redistribute, or challenge the commercial framing of political critique. In the Amsal case, resistance requires different resources: professional associations, procurement expertise, creator solidarity, court review, public advocacy, and institutional reform that recognizes intellectual labor. Mosco's account of structuration and hegemony is

useful here because dominant arrangements persist not through coercion alone but by becoming common sense. The analytical task is to identify gaps between that common sense and lived experience between the promise of a creative economy and the administrative invisibility of creative work, and between democratic political critique and the commercial extraction of attention.

The contribution of the comparison in this study therefore lies in demonstrating divergence. Commercial recognition can transform political communication into a revenue-bearing asset, whereas bureaucratic non-recognition can transform creative labour into disputed expenditure and legal vulnerability. Differential valuation names the relation between these distinct, rather than identical, institutional processes. It also directs attention to resistance where audiences may challenge commercial framing, while creative workers may require professional solidarity, procurement expertise, public advocacy, and judicial review to contest administrative devaluation.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that a critical political economy of communication must examine not only whether communication is commodified but also how institutions authorize particular definitions of value. Mosco's account of commodification remains essential for analysing PSA where political critique is embedded in a commercial infrastructure capable of converting content, labor, and audience attention into exchangeable resources. Mosco's account of commodification remains essential for analysing PSA, where political critique

is embedded within a commercial infrastructure capable of converting content and audience attention into exchangeable resources. The Amsal Sitepu case requires a related but distinct concept in which administrative devaluation, or the institutional refusal to recognise intellectual and creative labour as legitimate economic value.

The theoretical contribution is therefore differential valuation. Market recognition and administrative devaluation are connected mechanisms of power, but they should not be collapsed into one process. The former may enable extraction of revenue and surplus from communication; the latter can produce dispossession, exclusion from compensation, reputational damage, and legal vulnerability. Both depend on unequal control over the institutional conditions through which communicative labor becomes economically and legally intelligible.

Future research should examine, obtain and analyse procurement contracts, audit reports, court decisions, platform revenue arrangements, and interviews with creators, producers, audiences, and state officials. This extensive research in the future would clarify how market expansion, state regulation, cultural meaning, and struggles over the recognition of creative labour interact across different communication environments

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