



From Self-Presentation to Self-Commodification: A Critical Sociological Reading of Influencers' Transformations in the Digital Environment

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ABSTRACT:

This study offers a critical sociological reading of the transformation of influencers' presence in digital spaces—from self-presentation as an interactive act to self-commodification as an economic resource managed according to the logic of platforms and the market. The research adopts a composite theoretical approach that draws on Erving Goffman's contributions to self-presentation and impression management, George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism and the formation of identity through the "generalized other," and Axel Honneth's "concept of recognition," complemented by contemporary literature on the attention economy and algorithmic structures.

The study employs a critical theoretical methodology supported by comparative case illustrations (global, Arab, and Algerian contexts) to highlight the mechanisms driving the shift from social performance to the construction of a marketable personal brand. It argues that the influencer's self is now reconfigured within permanently connected digital stages, where boundaries between "front stage" and "backstage" collapse, and interaction metrics are transformed into liquid symbolic capital. The analysis demonstrates how platform architectures and algorithms quantify recognition and convert it into performance indicators, prompting influencers to adopt "commodifying" strategies such as image management, emotional labor, and content circulation aligned with market trends.

Furthermore, the study reveals the accompanying social and ethical implications—fragility of authenticity, erosion of privacy, and the reproduction of inequalities in visibility and profitability—while noting local specificities in the Algerian context linked to the emergence of a digital advertising market and disparities in technological resources.

The study's contribution lies in integrating the perspectives of Goffman, Mead, and Honneth within a unified framework that explains the shift from social recognition to monetized recognition, and in proposing analytical axes for reassessing platform policies and influencer marketing practices in ways that preserve the human dimension of digital identity.

Keywords: digital influencers; self-commodification; self-presentation; symbolic interaction; recognition; algorithms; attention economy; digital media.

Introduction:

Over the past three decades, profound structural transformations have reshaped the patterns of human communication, driven by the massive spread of digital technologies and the deep integration of social media platforms into everyday life. These platforms have redrawn the boundaries between the private and public spheres and redefined how individuals present themselves before others (Papacharissi, 2010). Whereas self-presentation in the past was confined to face-to-face interactions bounded by temporal and spatial contexts, it has now become an open, continuous, and multidimensional process, enabled by the networked nature of the digital environment.

From the perspective of interactionist sociology, Erving Goffman's work provides a lens for interpreting this transformation through the theatrical metaphor. He conceives social life as a series of "performances" in which individuals play roles before an audience, employing various strategies to manage impressions (Goffman, 1959). While Goffman's framework was initially intended to describe interactions in physical spaces, the digital environment has added new layers of complexity: individuals—particularly influencers—can now control the stage, edit the scene, and re-direct their performances to maximize appeal for diverse audiences. This capacity for self-reproduction extends beyond the "front stage" to include manipulation of the "backstage," blurring the boundaries between the real and the imagined.

From George Herbert Mead's perspective, the self is not a fixed entity but a product of symbolic interaction, formed through one's perception of self via the "generalized other" (Mead, 1934). In the digital environment, algorithms have reshaped this "other," transforming the audience into a composite of individuals and virtual communities whose presence is quantified through metrics such as followers, views, and likes. This objectification of the audience compels influencers to reformulate their selves according to audience expectations, turning self-presentation from an expressive communicative act into a strategic performance aimed at maximizing public approval (Marwick, 2015).

This transformation invites engagement with Axel Honneth's critical theory of recognition, which posits that social recognition is a fundamental condition for the development of a healthy human identity, achieved through three dimensions: love, rights, and social esteem (Honneth, 1995). However, in the digital environment—dominated by the market logic of the attention economy—these standards of recognition have been redefined. Social recognition has become contingent on commercial performance metrics and the marketability of the self (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Consequently, the moral dimension of recognition gives way to an instrumental one, linking an individual's value to their ability to transform their persona into a profitable brand.

These developments mark a crucial shift from self-presentation as an interactive process aimed at expressing identity, to self-commodification as an economic strategy governed by market logic. Digital influencers are no longer merely individuals sharing their lives or ideas with the public; they have become economic agents producing carefully curated content that reflects a commodified image of the self, merging the personal and the commercial into a single enterprise.

From a critical sociological standpoint, this reality raises several pressing questions: To what extent can the human dimension of communication be preserved under the dominance of market rationality? How does self-commodification reshape social norms and cultural values within digital spaces? And does this shift reproduce new forms of social and cultural inequality, or does it open up broader opportunities for individual empowerment?

Accordingly, this study aims to provide a critical reading of the transformation of digital influencers from self-presentation to self-commodification by integrating Goffman's dramaturgical model of social life, Mead's symbolic interactionism, and Honneth's critical theory of recognition. It seeks to deconstruct the mechanisms underlying this transformation and explore its implications for the social construction of identity in the digital age, emphasizing its economic and cultural dimensions within a technological environment that continually redefines the conditions of human interaction and redistributes symbolic power in society.

1. "Self-Presentation" as a Sociological Concept

The concept of self-presentation occupies a central place in interactionist and phenomenological sociology, as it describes how individuals manage their image before others within a network of symbolic and social interactions. Its clearest theoretical foundation can be found in the works of Erving Goffman, who argued that social life closely resembles a theatrical performance in which individuals play roles before a social audience across various spheres of daily life (Goffman, 1959). The individual, in this view, is not a closed entity but a theatrical actor—conscious of being observed—and therefore adjusts appearance, manner, and language in order to produce a desired impression on others.

What Goffman proposes is not merely a literary metaphor but an analytical framework for understanding the fine structure of social relations. Every social interaction, he argues, is governed by impression management, wherein individuals seek to control how they are perceived by others—to present themselves in ways that ensure recognition and acceptance (Goffman, 1959). Thus, the self is, at its core, an interactional construct formed through the gaze of others rather than through a purely internal awareness.

In traditional social environments—family, professional, or community settings—self-presentation took place within relatively contained spaces, where individuals knew their audience, the limits of their performance, and the consequences of their behavior. In contrast, the digital environment has transformed the stage into an infinite space where audiences intermingle and the self becomes exposed before invisible publics, leading to a reformulation of the very foundations of social performance. Social media platforms are no longer mere channels of communication; they have become spaces of perpetual self-presentation, where identity is continually reconstructed through images, interactions, and content (Marwick, 2013).

Influencers, as digital actors specialized in the production of impressions, embody this transformation most completely. They present their selves as integrated projects of display, managing every detail of their appearance through visual tools, aesthetic language, and emotional discourse—all in pursuit of digital recognition quantified by views, followers, and likes (Illouz, 2019). Here, self-presentation shifts from a limited social act to a comprehensive symbolic economy—from an interactional performance to a practice with capitalist dimensions.

The critical shift becomes evident when we realize that the Goffmanian "social stage" no longer distinguishes between the front stage and backstage of life. The personal and the public have merged into a single open space. Influencers in the Algerian digital sphere, such as Rifka and Numidia Lezoul, or in the broader Arab context, such as Ahmed Al Shugairi and Joe Hattab, exemplify this fusion between the personal and the professional, the spontaneous and the curated, the intimate and the performative. They perform their selves in ways that merge

recognition with spectacle, turning human existence itself into a continuous display (Bauman, 2000).

Thus, self-presentation is no longer merely a social behavior but an existential framework through which the individual is redefined by their digitally circulated image. The contemporary influencer is not simply a social actor but a self-producer—an entrepreneur of identity—who works upon the self as a symbolic commodity in an open market governed not by the traditional norms of recognition, but by the logics of algorithmic visibility and virality.

2. George Herbert Mead and the Construction of the Self through Symbolic Interaction

George Herbert Mead is regarded as one of the founding figures of symbolic interactionism. He argued that the self can only be understood through social interaction and that it emerges within the realm of language and symbols (Mead, 1934). For Mead, the individual does not possess a ready-made self; rather, the self is constructed through interaction with others in social communication spaces. Hence, the self is the result of a continuous dialectical process between the “I” and the “Me.”

Mead’s theory rests on two key concepts: the Significant Other and the Generalized Other. The former refers to specific individuals with whom one interacts directly and from whom one acquires initial perceptions of the self; the latter represents the wider community or society that provides normative reference points for behavior. Accordingly, an individual can only perceive their self through the “gaze of the other”—that is, through mutual recognition within the social structure.

In the digital environment, however, the notion of the Generalized Other has taken on an entirely new form. The audience is no longer bounded by geography or culture but has become virtual, global, and fluid—composed of anonymous followers and algorithmic systems that determine what is visible and what remains hidden. The digital influencer, in this context, continually reconstructs the self through interaction with this networked other, which bestows recognition and symbolic value (Marwick, 2022). Every like, share, or comment constitutes a form of symbolic recognition that reinforces the influencer’s self-construction.

If the self, according to Mead, is grounded in symbolic interaction, the digital environment has redefined the very nature of symbols. Images, emojis, hashtags, and visual gestures have become new linguistic tools for self-construction. This has given rise to a new language of interaction, enabling individuals to produce their selves within a networked communicative framework. Consequently, the influencer embodies a new form of the Meadian self—one constituted through a connected web of meanings rather than through direct physical presence.

This transformation marks a shift from face-to-face interaction to what might be called mythologized interaction: a form of interaction in which the self reshapes itself into an idealized, meticulously crafted image that aligns with audience expectations. In their pursuit of recognition, influencers subject their selves to the logic of continuous production, turning communication into a form of emotional labor, as described by Eva Illouz (Illouz, 2019). Here, the self no longer belongs solely to its owner; it becomes an open space for the exchange of symbols, recognition, and eventually, commodification.

The mediated dimension of the contemporary self expresses a profound shift in the structure of social interaction. Rather than serving as a mirror of the other, the self becomes a

reflection of the algorithm that dictates the conditions of visibility. Recognition thus becomes digital, and the Generalized Other is embodied in the platform itself—with its mechanisms of evaluation, promotion, and distribution. In this way, symbolic interaction loses its direct human quality, transforming into interaction with a technological structure that mediates both consciousness and existence.

At this level, influencers in the Arab world—including the Algerian experience—reproduce their selves through digital symbols that oscillate between the local and the global. The influencer Numidia Lezoul, for example, constructs her digital identity through a blend of aesthetic and linguistic symbols reflecting multiple social representations, while Rifka presents himself through a performative, often humorous style that expresses Algerian symbolic interaction between authenticity and imitation. These performances are far from spontaneous; they are the result of an ongoing negotiation between the self, the audience, and the platform—precisely the dynamic that Mead envisioned in his dialectical model of the I and the Other (Mead, 1934).

3. Axel Honneth and the Theory of Social Recognition

Axel Honneth is one of the leading contemporary theorists who revived Hegelian social philosophy within a critical framework through what is known as the Theory of Recognition. Honneth begins from the premise that the development of human selfhood and moral integrity can only be achieved through mutual recognition among individuals within society (Honneth, 1995). He identifies three interrelated dimensions of recognition:

- **Recognition in the sphere of love**, which provides the self with emotional security and forms the foundation for self-confidence.
- **Recognition in the sphere of rights**, which ensures the individual's respect as an autonomous social actor endowed with citizenship and legal equality.
- **Recognition in the sphere of social solidarity**, which allows the self to experience a sense of worth within the community through active contribution to the common good.

However, in the context of contemporary digital environments, this process of recognition is inverted. The human need for esteem is transformed into a compulsive quest for symbolic consumption and visibility. The digital self—as exemplified by influencers on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok—no longer seeks moral recognition but rather market validation, manifested through followers, likes, and brand contracts. In this way, the desire for recognition is converted into a mechanism of commodification, where social existence is measured by the capacity to attract attention and generate profit (Fuchs, 2014).

This paradox is particularly visible in the Algerian and broader Arab contexts. Influencers such as Numidia Lezoul and Rifka, among many others, construct idealized self-images that are reproduced according to the logic of the media market rather than genuine social interaction. They do not present themselves as social actors seeking interpersonal acknowledgment, but as symbolic products designed for consumption. Consequently, recognition becomes a commodity, and relationships are transformed into commercial exchanges wrapped in emotional rhetoric.

This critical reinterpretation of the concept of recognition opens a broader horizon for understanding communicative behavior on digital platforms as an extension of late capitalism,

which has redefined the human self as a perpetual marketing project. The digital identity thus becomes a stage where symbolic recognition intersects with the political economy of attention. Within this framework, the influencer occupies a dual position—both a victim of the system and a symbol of its success—embodying the contradictions of a culture where recognition, visibility, and value are increasingly governed by the imperatives of the market (Honneth, 2007).

4. The Digital Environment as a Space for Self-Reconstruction

With the profound digital transformation that contemporary societies have undergone, digital platforms have become new arenas for reconstructing and presenting the self. Just as cafés, universities, or city squares once served as symbolic spaces for social interaction in traditional societies, today's social networks—such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok—function as a “new stage” upon which individuals perform their identities before an ever-changing and potentially infinite audience (Turkle, 2011).

Within this space, the criteria of interaction have been radically transformed: appreciation is no longer based on human closeness or social intimacy, but on digital metrics—numbers of followers, likes, and shares. This shift redefines the very notion of identity, as the self becomes an interactive profile shaped by algorithms and audience expectations. Self-presentation is thus no longer a fully autonomous act but one conditioned by a digital discourse that rewards what is attractive, sensational, and easily consumable (boyd, 2014).

This transformation has contributed to the rise of what researchers call the Attention Economy, where digital visibility becomes both symbolic and economic capital (Goldhaber, 1997). Here, Goffman's dramaturgical analysis converges with Honneth's recognition theory: the “social stage” has turned into a “platform”, and social recognition has been replaced by algorithmic engagement. In place of genuine social relationships emerges what might be termed “virtual recognition”—a form of digital validation that provides individuals with an illusory sense of belonging and success (Zuboff, 2019).

Real-world examples illustrate a wide spectrum of these practices—from creating “inspirational” content aimed at building value-based identities to promoting beauty products and fashion trends. What unites them all is that the self has become a productive domain, and social interaction has evolved into a mechanism for measuring the market value of individuals. In Algeria, for instance, many influencers now tailor their discourse according to trending topics to expand their follower base, revealing how the self is continually reshaped by the cultural logic of supply and demand.

In this sense, the digital environment serves as a sociological laboratory where concepts of selfhood, recognition, and identity are being reconfigured. It dissolves the boundaries between private and public, authenticity and imitation, and self-expression and commercial promotion. The individual no longer presents the self merely to communicate, but rather to be quantified—through data, views, and brand deals.

5. From Self-Presentation to Self-Commodification: The Shift from Recognition to Market Value

This section represents the most analytical stage of the theoretical framework, highlighting how the practice of self-presentation has evolved from a communicative act seeking social

recognition to a symbolic commodity governed by the logic and mechanisms of the digital market. This transformation can only be fully understood by integrating the sociological perspectives of Erving Goffman, George Herbert Mead, and Axel Honneth, within the broader context of the political economy of communication, which reshapes relations of power and representation in the digital sphere (Mosco, 2009).

In Goffman's stage, self-presentation was linked to social performance—an individual's ability to control the impressions they leave on others in the theater of everyday life. The goal was to maintain a coherent social image aligned with expected roles, presupposing a reciprocal awareness between actor and audience. In the digital environment, however, this reciprocal exchange has been replaced by constant surveillance and algorithmic measurement, where evaluation is both collective and automated. The spectator no longer sits in the audience; they are a data point in a statistical system that determines the fate of the performer through engagement metrics. Consequently, the boundary between self and commodity dissolves—the self is displayed, quantified, and sold.

For Herbert Mead, the self was constructed through internalizing the gaze of the “generalized other”—society as a moral reference shaping behavior. In the digital context, however, this “other” becomes algorithmic: a “computational other” that directs individuals' actions according to platform logics. The influencer no longer reflects the expectations of a real social community, but rather those of a technical system that rewards attention-grabbing content rather than socially or culturally meaningful communication. Thus, the self shifts from the moral domain to the performative-commercial domain, and from social interaction to market-oriented interaction (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

From Axel Honneth's perspective, this transformation represents a profound distortion of the concept of recognition. While recognition originally aimed to establish humane relations based on mutual respect and symbolic esteem, commodification drains recognition of its ethical essence, turning it into a mere indicator of market value. This is evident in the behavior of influencers who measure their social worth through follower counts and advertising contracts rather than cultural or ethical impact. What is being bought and sold in this market is not a tangible product but the image of the self: appearance, language, everyday life—even personal relationships become displayable and consumable content (Hearn, 2008).

The contours of this commodification are evident in contemporary digital culture. Global figures such as Kim Kardashian exemplify what Jean Baudrillard called “simulacra”—fame no longer grounded in real achievement but in the self as a self-referential brand (Baudrillard, 1981). Similarly, PewDiePie, the Swedish content creator, represents another model, where the digital persona becomes a sustainable entertainment product, generating profit by turning emotions and reactions into media commodities.

In the Arab context, influencers like Ahmed Al-Shugairi and Joe Hattab illustrate a more “ideologized” transition toward moral or cultural commodification: the self is wrapped in reformist or motivational discourse but remains governed by the logics of popularity and viewership. In Algeria, figures such as Numidia Lezoul and Rifka reinforce the idea that digital identity is no longer a reflection of real personality but an ongoing marketing project, where images and stances shift according to momentary engagement metrics.

Here, commodification does not eliminate recognition but replaces it with a counterfeit version. The digital individual receives instant recognition from anonymous audiences but loses the depth of genuine social recognition grounded in real relationships and human appreciation. The self thus becomes an economic resource within what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism,” where value is extracted directly from human behavior itself (Zuboff, 2019).

This logic of commodification redefines the relationship between self and society. Instead of being an agent within a network of symbolic exchanges, the individual becomes an object of measurement and circulation—no longer communicating to be understood, but to be sold. Here lies the central sociological and ethical dilemma of the digital age: the self is no longer presented as a human being but as an economic interface within a market of symbols—where identity becomes labor, and everyday life becomes continuous production of value.

6. Sociological Problems and Ethical Dimensions of the Shift from Self-Presentation to Self-Commodification

The shift from self-presentation as a communicative act aimed at social recognition to the commodification of the self as an economic resource is not merely a superficial change in modes of expression or interaction; it represents a structural transformation in the very nature of the modern self and its relationship with others, society, and technology. This transformation raises a set of sociological and ethical issues that touch the core of human action itself, turning the digital space into an open laboratory for redefining what it means to be human in an age of the generalized commodification of symbols (Han, 2017).

The first of these issues appears in the disintegration of identity’s meaning. In his dramaturgical analysis, Erving Goffman viewed individuals as shifting between multiple roles while retaining a stable core — the “backstage self” — that granted them symbolic consistency (Goffman, 1959). However, digital platforms have erased the boundaries between “frontstage” and “backstage.” Everything is now displayed, and every interaction is potentially circulated and consumed. The digital self thus suffers from what may be called a loss of existential depth: the distinction between what is performed and what is lived, between authenticity and acting, collapses. Human action becomes an uninterrupted performance without backstage, stripping the self of privacy and symbolic authenticity.

From Herbert Mead’s perspective, the essence of self-formation lies in the internal dialogue between the “I” and the “Me” — a symbolic process requiring mutual recognition and self-awareness (Mead, 1934). Yet, in the digital environment, this dialogue is distorted by the logic of algorithms that redefine the “Other” according to engagement metrics rather than understanding. The self no longer develops in relation to a real other, but before a statistical other — a digital audience quantified in numbers and data. Consequently, symbolic interaction becomes biased toward the quantitative over the qualitative, the superficial over the substantive; the process of self-construction is reduced to display, not expression.

From Axel Honneth’s standpoint, this situation represents a crisis of recognition, since recognition is meant to express an ethical relationship that grounds self-confidence and mutual respect (Honneth, 1995). In the digital context, however, recognition loses its human meaning when it becomes “programmed recognition” — granted not by relationships but by algorithms. Instead of being a condition of freedom, recognition becomes a mechanism of social control: individuals strive to conform to the logic of the digital market to preserve their virtual “status.”

Recognition thus turns into an invisible disciplinary system, masked by the illusion of popularity and acceptance.

These dynamics lead to a complex ethical crisis in which humans no longer seek to be understood, but to be measured and evaluated. According to Honneth, the loss of genuine recognition results in reification — the reduction of the self to a functional object detached from values and meaning. In this context, virtues such as authenticity, honesty, and humility become marketing strategies in influencer discourse, used to generate new forms of symbolic capital measured through engagement (Bourdieu, 1986).

This transformation takes on a particularly acute dimension in Arab and Algerian societies, where the transition from traditional to modern social structures remains incomplete. Local influencers often find themselves caught between two contradictory models: the traditional form of social recognition based on family or symbolic status, and the digital form of recognition based on instant popularity. This tension produces a hybrid self — modern in appearance but unstable in substance — leading to a digital identity crisis reflected in the oscillation between ethics and profit, message and advertisement.

Another pressing concern is the question of moral responsibility. In Goffman's social theater, the actor was aware of their role and its boundaries. In the digital sphere, however, those boundaries dissolve in favor of the theatricalization of reality itself: the influencer does not play a role but lives the role as their real life. The distinction between public and private life becomes almost impossible. This gives rise to a culture of self-surveillance, where the individual becomes the guardian of their own image rather than a social actor. This mode of being corresponds to what Byung-Chul Han calls the "performance society", in which the individual becomes a perpetual project of self-optimization and self-promotion (Han, 2017).

The implications of this transformation extend beyond the individual to the entire social structure. Digital identity is now reproduced within institutions such as education, media, advertising, and even politics: the politician becomes a digital influencer, the artist a marketer of their image, the academic an online content creator. All this occurs within what Guy Debord (1967) termed the "society of the spectacle", where social relations are reduced to exchanges of images. Social recognition becomes visual, and belonging depends on the symbolic visibility one maintains in the digital public sphere.

Hence, the ethical dimensions of this transformation open profound questions about the future of human action:

- Can the digital self remain human under the dominance of market logic?
- Is recognition still possible in a space governed by algorithms?
- Can a balance be restored between recognition as a human value and commodification as an economic logic?

These questions do not find their answers within a single theoretical framework, but they reveal the urgent need to restore the human dimension of communication, as emphasized by Mead, Goffman, and Honneth each from their own standpoint. The human being cannot be reduced to an interface or a set of interaction data; they are a communicative being who needs recognition as an end in itself, not a means. Thus, this critical awareness becomes the first step toward resisting the logic of commodification and rebuilding digital selves on ethical rather than market-based foundations.

Conclusion:

This critical sociological reading reveals that the transformation from self-presentation to self-commodification in the digital environment is not merely a superficial communicative phenomenon, but rather an ontological and ethical shift in the very structure of the modern self. The digital sphere has reshaped the individual's relationship with both the self and others, shifting communicative action from a realm of symbolic interaction and mutual recognition—as theorized by Herbert Mead and Axel Honneth—to a space governed by consumerist performance and algorithmic evaluation, echoing Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, though far exceeding the level of exposure he could have imagined.

It becomes clear that the digital self no longer seeks communication as a fundamentally human act, but rather as a means of marketability through constructing an image that aligns with the demands of the new symbolic market. The contemporary influencer thus lives in a state of existential duality: on the one hand, striving for social recognition that affirms a sense of worth, while on the other, submitting to market logic that turns this recognition into quantifiable symbolic capital. Recognition itself becomes part of the economic production process—shifting from an ethical value to a market indicator.

This dynamic reveals a profound paradox: while the digital space has empowered individuals with unprecedented tools for self-expression, it has simultaneously stripped this expression of its human depth, turning the self into a promotional façade consumed by both platforms and audiences. The very technologies that promised freedom and empowerment have produced a new form of alienation—an alienation within the self, where the individual becomes more a monitor of their own performance than an autonomous actor.

From Honneth's perspective, the absence of authentic recognition leads to what he calls hidden social contempt, where one's human worth becomes conditional upon digital visibility. This not only weakens personal identity but also erodes the moral foundations of social behavior. The race for recognition through views and followers fosters patterns of conduct that reflect platform and market logic rather than collective human values.

In the Arab and particularly Algerian context, the gravity of this transformation is amplified for two reasons: first, the fragility of symbolic structures that give meaning to social recognition; and second, the rapid normalization of commodification logic among a new generation of influencers lacking sufficient critical awareness. Thus, the key question becomes not how one presents oneself, but to whom and for what purpose this presentation is continuously reproduced.

The sociological challenge today is not to reject technology or deny the digital sphere, but to restore the human dimension of interaction and recognition within it. Technology is not an inescapable fate but a tool that can be reoriented toward fostering more conscious and responsible selves. The solution may lie in reviving Honneth's notion of mutual recognition, reintroducing Mead's symbolic interactionism, and reinterpreting Goffman's dramaturgy through a new critical lens that accounts for algorithmic power.

In sum, the shift from self-presentation to self-commodification reflects a deeper transformation in digital modernity—where human values recede before market rationality, and social relations are replaced by performative ones. Rethinking this shift requires more than

descriptive understanding; it demands a critical stance that restores the human as a free, reflective self rather than a tradable façade.

As Habermas (1981) reminds us, the greatest challenge lies in preserving communicative reason against instrumental reason—that is, safeguarding human meaning from economic domination. Communicative action thus becomes a symbolic form of resistance against commodification, a continual reminder that the self's worth lies not in the content it produces, but in the meaning it conveys.

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