4 "Follower Factories" in Indonesia and Beyond: Automation and Labor in a Transnational Market

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In March 2019, in a quiet residential area of Bekasi, a commuter city in the eastern part of greater Jakarta, I watch Ibrahim finish up a FIFA soccer game on his PlayStation gaming system. Ibrahim produces and sells services such as the delivery of followers, likes, and comments on platforms like Instagram—what in the media has often been called "click farming"—but what I, in line with market terminology, will call "social media marketing services" (SMM services). If a customer wants to artificially increase the follower count on their Instagram account—for instance, as a basis for monetary gain through sponsored posts for companies or simply to appear more popular—they can contact Ibrahim, who can use the large number of accounts he controls or can access to add, say, 1,000 followers to the customer's account for a fee.[1] Ibrahim's monthly gross income was at the time, he claimed, around US$40,000 (although this fluctuated, often dramatically)—90 percent of which came from Instagram followers—which makes him one of the leading click farmers in Indonesia.

With his earnings, Ibrahim purchased a two-story house, in which he lives with his wife and daughter on the bottom floor while running his business on the second floor, where eight staff members work. In the room adjacent to the second-floor living room area where we are hanging out, three men in their early twenties are sitting at desks in front of laptop computers, packs of cigarettes and coffee at their sides, two floor fans keeping the humid heat at bay. Two are using WhatsApp for customer service—answering questions, copy-pasting price lists, and responding to problems—and a third, a programmer, is fixing bugs on the software application they base their business on, though he spends most of his time developing a new, improved system. Ibrahim's right-hand man, Hari, deals with the order list, for which they use Google Sheets, while his cousin and sister are in charge of administration and bookkeeping. In another room, a content writer is producing articles in Indonesian for Ibrahim's websites—so far around 120—that focus on keywords that aim to push them to the top of Google rankings. In other parts of the sprawling city, five YouTubers promote his websites on their channels

as marketing affiliates. Ibrahim spends most of his time browsing the Internet, checking on competitors, looking for new ideas, and trying to figure out the next step forward for his business in the face of a fluctuating, cutthroat market.

In recent years, it has been widely publicized that the "like economy" (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013) or "influence economy" (Confessore et al. 2018) centered on social media has become compromised as the market for SMM services has grown. Beginning in 2014, countless accounts have been deleted in recurring Instagram purges to counter artificial inflation in follower counts, with many major celebrities losing a large proportion of their followers (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020, 137–138). A recent industry report suggests that more than half of all Instagram accounts worldwide have fake followers or comments, or use engagement bots, while the numbers for social media influencers are far higher (Hickman 2019). "Vanity metrics" (Rogers 2018) and "Insta fraud" (Ellis 2019), perpetrated when so-called social media influencers are paid to market products based on artificially inflated follower counts, appear to be prevalent.

With the growth of a broader Internet platform economy, the range of SMM services is expanding. These include the supply not only of Instagram followers but also of You-Tube subscribers, LinkedIn endorsements, IMDb views, TikTok likes, and Spotify premium plays, to name a few. This market, however, has been dominated over the past few years by Instagram, which has increasingly mediated the rise of social media influencers and the transformation of celebrity culture globally. In light of this, Alice Marwick (2015, 137) coined the term *Instafame*, or "the condition of having a relatively great number of followers on the app." In Indonesia, the supply of Instagram followers has commanded the SMM services market to such a degree that it is simply termed *jual* (sell) *followers*.

Little is known, however, about the actual organization of this market and the infrastructure and labor that underpin it. The "click farms" or "follower factories" that produce and sell SMM services via digital marketplaces have been considered key actors in this market, with both terms suggesting the existence of an industry based on digital sweatshop labor (see Tai and Hu [2018]). Beyond journalists' reports (e.g., Clark 2015; Confessore et al. 2018), however, there is no systematic description or analysis of these types of workspaces and their relationship to the broader market. This chapter fills this empirical gap by drawing on interviews with, and ethnographic observations of, 30 actors involved in SMM services in Indonesia between 2017 and 2019, as well as Skype interviews with 10 additional actors in Bangladesh, India, Egypt, Morocco, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, and the US undertaken in 2019. Based on this data, the chapter offers a description of a part of the market for SMM services based on websites such as the ones Ibrahim runs.

The chapter describes the labor that underpins this market in order to engage with broader scholarly discussions concerning digital labor. The representation of click farms

as digital sweatshops is based on at least three premises: the SMM services market is organized according to a particular form of labor ("clicking"), there is a spatial concentration of labor ("farms"), and labor relations within this space are generally exploitative ("sweatshops"). My Indonesian interlocutors show that these are oversimplifications. Addressing these premises, the chapter will describe how the SMM services market is less concerned with "clicking" than with developing automation. In this process, diverse forms of labor such as customer service and marketing become critical as SMM services businesses scale up and reach a broader range of customers. This labor is dependent on translocal networked relations within Indonesia and across national borders, but also tends to be concentrated in particular spaces and organized by entrepreneurs like Ibrahim along the lines of kinship or friendship. This suggests that these forms of digital labor must be approached as much in terms of intimacy and even aspiration as in terms of inequality. In Indonesia, digital labor should be considered in the context of historically situated forms of labor organization based on patron-client relations characterized by both a degree of intimacy and inequality (Scott 1976). Historically, the power of the patron was centered on the control of material resources such as land, but in the digital economy the primary resource is knowledge, creating an increasing degree of instability as patron-client relationships can more easily be disturbed or upended (see Aspinall [2013]).

More generally, this perspective from the Global South allows for an engagement with current debates that take the Global North or North-South divides as a starting point for approaching digital labor. Much can be gained from considering the market for SMM services in particular, and the organization of planetary digital labor more generally, as culturally situated. The view from the SMM services market in Indonesia reveals, for instance, that the organization of planetary digital labor is shaped by language competence and that the global market as a whole remains largely obfuscated to even my most successful interlocutors. This perspective accords with recent calls for an attentiveness to "big data from the South," not least with respect to how theory often disregards "the specificities of distinct geographies, cultures, and communities" (Milan and Treré 2019, 320), while resonating with ongoing scholarly discussions about digital labor that aim to make "invisible productive activities visible" (Casilli 2017, 3947). Indeed, recent work on "commercial content moderators" (Roberts 2019), "ghost work" (Gray and Suri 2019), and the "remote gig economy" (Wood et al. 2019) has highlighted the importance of the concealed and precarious global labor force that works for tech giants like Amazon, Facebook, and Uber, as well as labor platforms such as Upwork (Irani 2015). Building on this emerging research field, which has focused on labor organization *through* corporate platforms, this chapter turns to labor taking shape

alongside these platforms and highlights the specificities of these relationships in an uneven transnational market.

The Rise of Digital Indonesia

With more than 30 million people, Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, is one of the largest urban agglomerations in the world; it is also characterized by an intense use of social media. In 2012, it was named the world's most active Twitter city (Lipman 2012). Five years later, it had the most location tags on Instagram Stories (Taylor 2017). Ride-hailing apps such as the Indonesian Gojek and Singaporean Grab have developed a wide range of services—from food delivery to cleaning services—that have transformed the urban landscape in Jakarta and other cities across the country (see, for example, Ford and Honan [2017]). Indonesians are also world leaders in time spent on the mobile Internet, around four hours per day, with nearly 85 percent of users accessing the Internet through a mobile device in 2015 (Google and Temasek 2017). For many people in Indonesia today, connecting to the Internet means using social media platforms. As Merlyna Lim (2018, 163) puts it, without a hint of irony, in Indonesia "Facebook, in fact, is more popular than the Internet."

Most of my interlocutors came of age in this rapidly expanding digital environment—the older ones in Indonesian-style Internet cafés (*warnet*), learning through collective browsing and inexpensive all-night sessions, the younger ones through individual smartphones (Lim 2018, 156). In this process, Internet cafés have been replaced by convenience stores such as 7-Eleven, which offer free Wi-Fi, thus becoming nodes in a "cyberurban" landscape where youth hang out (*nongkrong*), communicate, and share ideas (Lim 2018, 166). As a result, Internet cafés have increasingly been transformed into gaming centers that depend on high bandwidth. It is in these kinds of social spaces that my interlocutors have learned, through YouTube tutorials, Facebook groups, and Internet forums, how to make money with friends in the emerging digital economy. In these contexts, there is a pervasive discourse of being self-taught (*autodidakt*). As one of my interlocutors put it, he learned "along the way" (*dijalani* in Indonesian or *dilakoni* in Javanese). The key actors in this market are thus generally "geeks" who became experts through their own will rather than through formal training (Jones 2011, 19–20).

Although my interlocutors are geographically concentrated to a degree in the Jakarta region—particularly in Bekasi, Tangerang, and Bogor, major urban areas in the greater metropolitan region—many of them live in other major cities such as Bandung, Pekanbaru, and Yogyakarta. A few inhabit smaller cities. One of the key actors in the Indonesian market is even based in Amsterdam, where he had moved as a child with

his parents from Indonesia. They are mainly young men, the majority in their late teens and early 20s, with the oldest in his early 30s. Most have a lower-middle-class to middle-class background—their parents are entrepreneurs, office workers, or teachers—and more than half have some college education. Their customers include web-based shops, companies, celebrities, politicians, and social media influencers. But they also include, for instance, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies, provincial police officers, and, not least, high school students in search of Instafame.

Ibrahim entered the SMM services market in his teens, when he started playing the multiplayer role-playing game World of Warcraft and soon learned that it was possible to sell World of Warcraft accounts on digital marketplaces such as Kaskus (www.kaskus .co.id). When Twitter quickly became a public presence in Indonesia in 2012, Ibrahim's primary goal was to rise to the top of the rankings. He began to create Twitter accounts until he had around 100,000, which he eventually began selling on Kaskus, setting the stage for his business as it has developed until today. His story is familiar among my interlocutors, who often started out with gaming, hacking, or carding (i.e., credit card fraud)—not primarily in order to make money but to compete with peers.

While making money has certainly become their primary incentive, it is important to recognize the social element of play, and deception itself as a form of play, as a driving force for the evolution of the SMM services market since 2012. This is in line with scholarly writing that has highlighted the intimate links between play and labor (or "playbor") in emerging digital worlds (e.g., Scholz 2013; Postigo 2016). Regarding the Chinese game industry, Lin Zhang and Anthony Fung, in their article "Working as Playing? Consumer Labor, Guild and the Secondary Industry of Online Gaming in China" in the February 2014 issue of *New Media & Society*, have identified a "secondary industry" consisting of "gamer-initiated business and services that emerged to fill gaps in the chain of game production and consumption, which occupy a grey area that often merges consumption with production and play with profits" (quoted in Tai and Hu 2018, 2370–2371). It is in this gray area of gamers, hackers, and entrepreneurs—located alongside global platforms such as Instagram—that the Indonesian SMM services industry has taken shape.

The SMM Services Market

The market for SMM services is highly complex and characterized by a wide range of practices that often develop through experimentation. This chapter is concerned neither with comprehensively listing these practices nor with the impossible task of describing this market or the production of SMM services. Instead, the focus is on the

forms of labor that underpin the reselling, or brokering, of these SMM services through websites. While my most successful interlocutors control a large number of Instagram accounts that they use when selling SMM services, they are not primarily concerned with mass-producing accounts. Instead, they generally run websites that focus on automated reselling, which has become an increasingly important part of the market around the world. This allows the significant scaling up of their businesses.

Sellers like Ibrahim need buyers to find the websites through which they sell their services. An Internet search for "buy follower" (*beli follower*), for instance, lists a wide range of websites where it is possible to purchase SMM services. Underpinning these websites are the so-called admin panels through which the website is managed, content is produced, and scripts are run that make the automated purchasing and selling of SMM services possible. These admin panels form the basis for a webshop. Some of the inter-locutors create panels themselves, but these are also increasingly available in a modular form for purchase or rent, a rudimentary version of services offered by the Canadian e-commerce giant Shopify.

Ibrahim has two primary websites at the top of Indonesian Google rankings, one for direct sales to clients and the other for resellers. The direct sales website offers more extensive individual customer support, while the reseller's website is largely automated and therefore cheaper. On the former website, a buyer—a social media influencer, for instance—contacts customer service and places a direct order. The buyer simply chooses the service they are interested in, say 1,000 Instagram followers, sends their Instagram user ID, and pays prior to transfer. On the latter website, it is necessary to register as a member. Members are able to log in, choose services from a menu, and after adding money to their account—usually through a bank transfer[2]—resell to their own customers in what is ideally a seamless process. In 2019, the reseller website had 6,000 registered resellers, of whom around 2,000 were highly active, which is in line with the most successful reseller sites in Indonesia.

For Instagram followers alone, depending on what services are currently available, customers can choose between dozens of types of accounts. Most notably, they vary in quality. The lowest-quality and cheapest accounts lack photos or posts and easily "drop" or are closed by Instagram. The higher-quality and more expensive accounts demand greater investment in terms of knowledge or labor—a photo, multiple posts, and some comments—and therefore have a higher chance of being identified as "authentic" by Instagram's algorithms. Ibrahim generally prioritizes the middle range but tests the accounts before reselling, as there is a balance between low prices and a good repu-tation for quality followers among the community of resellers that maximizes prof-its. There are also choices regarding speed of transfer—followers can be "injected" en

masse into purchasing accounts or "dripped" in a gradual transfer so as not to awaken suspicion—and regarding the identity or geographical location of the followers: male or female, Brazilian or Indonesian, even from specific cities.

Application programming interfaces (APIs) facilitate data exchange between applications, allow for the creation of new applications, and form the foundation for the "web as platform." Critical to the evolution of digital platforms ranging from Facebook to Upwork (Helmond 2015; Gray and Suri 2019), APIs are also at the center of the SMM services market. Through a simple procedure that requires no programming skills—it can be learned from Internet forums or YouTube tutorials—Ibrahim can create a multi-sided interface between websites (usually located abroad) and his resellers in Indonesia, so that SMM services can be purchased and resold automatically. In other words, when his customer in Indonesia purchases 1,000 Instagram followers from his website, these are in fact automatically transferred from another seller—based in India, for instance—via API. This process is often disrupted during Instagram's security updates, however; the international market comes to a standstill, with an ensuing scramble to match new algorithms before businesses are able to run again.

Ibrahim's staff fills the orders for the direct sales website manually, which basically means copying and pasting the buyer's Instagram user ID and inserting within the software programs they are running the number of followers that will be purchased and in what time frame. The staff thus rarely engage in "clicking," more often "copy-pasting," *copas* for short. This is also the case with customer service, in which price lists and standard responses are copy-pasted, usually via WhatsApp.

Ibrahim focuses on the Indonesian market, not least due to his lack of English language skills. There is no Indonesian seller with a significant presence on the international market. In fact, most have limited knowledge of the broader international websites that they purchase from or the actual source of the services they purchase, guessing that they are also resellers and that the actual production of accounts takes place elsewhere—perhaps in India, Russia, or Turkey. Ibrahim is obsessed with figuring out the source of the production of accounts, so that he can offer competitive prices that would allow him to "go global." A common conspiracy theory among resellers is that Instagram itself is the source of the fake follower business and that the most successful players have help on the "inside."

Reorganizing Labor

The increasing use of admin panels within the SMM services market has brought about the combination of automated processes with new forms of labor organization. In this

development, it is possible to see how many of the most successful SMM service businesses in Indonesia, and across the world, take a similar form: one key entrepreneur recruits a group of friends, relatives, or neighbors, who are paid a monthly salary and work in a shared physical space, usually in collaboration with others at a distance. The shift from play to labor is thus aligned with enduring social relationships.

Many of the most successful sellers often started out mass-producing accounts on their own—as Ibrahim did with Twitter—but later came to focus on reselling, thereby concentrating labor on marketing, customer service, and particularly Internet research, which leads to greater profit margins. For instance, Adi, my Indonesian interlocutor based in Amsterdam, who has been selling SMM services for nearly a decade, described a process whereby he had begun producing social media accounts through automated processes based on SIM-card verification. There were, however, frequent problems with automation, which made manual interventions necessary. He eventually realized that it was far easier and more profitable to turn over the production of accounts to digital labor platforms such as Fiverr. A market for admin panels has similarly developed centered on a small number of key developers. Well-functioning SMM service reseller websites have thus become widely available, increasing the incentive for entrepreneurs like Ibrahim and Adi to engage in arbitrage, while largely outsourcing technological innovation. As sales have scaled up and competition increased, Ibrahim and Adi have come to focus above all on reselling even though both have significant programming skills.

In particular, diverse forms of marketing strategies become critical. Sellers spam ads through accounts on Instagram and other social media platforms. For instance, Agus, based in Jakarta, had two staff designing ads for dozens of Instagram accounts that he used to market his own services. Over time, however, Ibrahim and others have shifted their strategy as Instagram increasingly closes down these types of accounts, engaged in what the platform terms "inauthentic activities,"[3] and ramps up security updates. Instead, Ibrahim primarily concentrates on pushing his own websites to the top of Google rankings through search engine optimization. He initially purchased Google ads but has more recently hired a university graduate as a full-time content writer to develop his blog, a strategy that appears to be both less expensive and more effective. To target potential resellers who lack previous experience and knowledge (i.e., entrants on the scene), he develops rankings with regard to basic keywords such as *jual follower* (sell follower)—terms that seasoned actors would never search for except to check the competition. Like Ibrahim, Adi paid a content writer to use specific keywords for titles, keywords, images, and hyperlinks based on research he conducted. Furthermore, Ibrahim and others also pay YouTube affiliates to market their services on their channels, particularly to recruit resellers.

Entrepreneurs like Ibrahim were constantly browsing the Internet and engaging in forums in order to learn more about developments in the market. Since being an early user of key terms is important for moving to the top of Google rankings, anticipating and describing how the market will develop appears to be critical. Adi, for instance, had his content writer blog about TikTok as it was becoming popular in anticipation that services would become available for purchase. Figuring out the best admin panels on the market and, above all, gaining an in-depth understanding of the differences in pricing and quality of the vast range of services available in Indonesia and around the world are absolutely critical.

Customer service is also important and should preferably be on call around the clock. As described in the opening vignette, Ibrahim had several staff dealing with customer service, responding to questions about and problems with services. Much of this work was done on laptops via WhatsApp or other platforms such as Line, but it is easily done on smartphones. During the time we spent together, Yohanes and Markus, who were based in Tangerang in Jakarta, were constantly in touch with customers on their phones, even while on the move. When they gave me a ride to the airport, Yohanes was texting in the driver's seat while Markus was steering with one hand on the wheel.

Spaces of Labor

Like Ibrahim, Agus—in his early 30s and one of the oldest and most experienced of my interlocutors—based his business out of a residential house he had purchased on the street where he had grown up in Tangerang in northwest Jakarta. In both cases, there was a clear spatial separation between family life and business. Unlike Ibrahim, Agus did not have a wife and children, but he kept the door to his bedroom, located behind the main office space, closed at all times. The public part of both houses had the feel of many small businesses or NGOs I had previously visited around the country, with desks and computers set up in offices in what would typically be a residential building. This is reminiscent of Chinese gold-farming "squads" who play online games in order to gather "virtual loot" that can be exchanged for "real-world currencies" (Tai and Hu 2018, 2371), much like Ibrahim did with World of Warcraft. These Chinese squads work in spaces that "look no different from a typical office arrangement" (Tai and Hu 2018, 2374). This setup contrasted with that of Yohanes, who moved to Tangerang from North Sulawesi with a group of three friends because the city has the best broadband in Indonesia and a well-known media college where they all study. He shared an apartment with his friends, but although they often worked on laptops there, they did not have defined workplaces. When we met at Starbucks, Yohanes pulled out his phone and told me, "This is where I work."

There was often a balance between the illicitness of the business and the allure of professionalism and legitimacy in the shaping of office spaces. While Yohanes and his friends, all in their early 20s, lived in a relatively anonymous apartment complex and couldn't have cared less about running a legitimate business, older interlocutors in residential areas were more concerned with how they were perceived and often attempted to hide their business from others. Neither Agus nor Ibrahim had signs in front of their houses to identify their business. Some neighbors wondered how they made money while working late at night indoors. It was considered *aneh* (strange), as one interlocutor put it, alluding to dark connections with the spirit world. In some cases, SMM services were the (more successful) back-office business of a business that ostensibly focused on website maintenance. Andreas, who for a time ran one of the best-known SMM services websites in Indonesia, rented an office in Jakarta's Central Business District in order to create a stronger impression on his customers and competitors. Indeed, even after his business had collapsed, a couple of Andreas's competitors believed he must be doing very well since he listed his office there. Similarly, most resellers created a distinctive logo and even staff uniforms. In some cases, they had office addresses that even appeared on Google Maps, but when I stopped by there was no such place.

Ibrahim's workspace is the closest to what might be termed a "digital sweatshop" that I have seen in Indonesia: one entrepreneur controls the business and the majority of the profits, while a group of workers gathered in one physical space are paid around $150 each month, with regular bonuses of around $100 per month. But the arrangement can hardly be understood in strictly exploitative terms—if anything, it is based on "lopsided friendships," kinship relations, or evolving patron-client relations (Wolf 2001). Acquaintances, friends, brothers, and cousins thus form the basis for the cheap labor that supplements automated processes from below. This type of arrangement offers critical insight not only into how planetary digital labor is taking shape in practice but also into how labor and commerce are organized in the cyberurban landscape (see Lim 2018, 166; Simone 2020). This reliance among small-scale entrepreneurs on intimate relations with workers accords with, but also moves us beyond, historical patterns of labor organization in Indonesia and across Asia. While patron-client relations have historically been based on material resources such as land and the importance of accessing seasonal labor, digital labor is primarily centered on knowledge. This fact can be considered in relation to an ongoing decentering of patron-client relations in the context of interrelated processes of political decentralization and digitalization in the post-Suharto era (Aspinall 2013). These types of labor relations are thus far more unstable; for instance, a few months of work for a business can easily form the basis for

starting one's own independent business. Such instability leads to an upending or fragmentation of historical forms of patron-client relationships in the context of planetary urbanization (see Brenner and Schmid 2012).

The instability becomes evident in different ways. Agus, for instance, was constantly worried about his staff stealing the secrets that underpinned his business, and he offered several examples of former workers who had used his ideas to start up their own businesses. Andreas told me that it was difficult to collaborate with close friends or relatives because of the fluctuating nature of the market, which often made it difficult to offer a stable salary. This is consistent with the work of Janet Carsten (1997), who describes how the owners of Malay fishing boats avoided working with close kin because of the high-risk nature of the endeavor, as failure risked not only economic income but also, more seriously, kinship relations. Other Indonesian entrepreneurs, however, were more relaxed about these processes, as they recognized that ambitious workers, often friends, were bound to leave sooner or later. There was a general excitement among most of them that Indonesia was "going digital," thus shaping a broader sensibility centered on the "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2004).

To create a sustainable business, however, it is critical not only to retain staff but also to recruit a large group of resellers, who may be located anywhere in the country. Resellers can easily move between sellers such as Ibrahim and Agus, and create new automated connections through APIs. Agus called such resellers *copaser* (copy-pasters), with disdain, highlighting their lack of programming knowledge. Although it is possible to change connections, many do not, because they have established relations with the seller, receive good customer service, or are simply lazy. As Wayan, a Jakarta-based reseller, put it, "Malas ganti API, ikut teman" (I am too lazy to change the API, I just do what my friend does). In order to draw resellers into his fold, Ibrahim has developed an Android application for them and creates tutorials in which he offers tips on how to improve sales. As is typical across reseller sites, he offers likes and followers as bonuses based on monthly sales rankings. This is important in retaining a sense of community and ultimately their engaged membership. Although Ibrahim and other major sellers generally do not know their members, there is often interaction on WhatsApp groups and particularly on Facebook, where they brag about their economic success.

Generally, the SMM services market is thus dominated by cottage industries centered in particular places and on friendship, kinship, or neighborhood relationships. Labor does not necessarily take place in a well-defined space, as the term *cottage* suggests, but it is generally centered on a particular urban area, as in the case of Yohanes and his friends. To be successful, however, these cottage industries are highly dependent not only on

networked connections with service providers and resellers but also, for instance, on You-Tubers who act as marketing affiliates. There is thus a continuum between concentrated and dispersed labor spaces.

Moving toward the Future

Many workers who engage with digital platform economies remain based in established employment structures—as is the case for Chinese taxi drivers who work across on-demand platforms like Didi Chuxing and with companies that control the traditional taxi industry (Chen 2018, 2694). This attentiveness to how platform economies coexist with established economies is critical when considering how both digital labor and general market engagement are shaped in cultural and economic contexts. My most successful interlocutors were highly cognizant of the fluctuations of the market for SMM services, recognizing that it could very well collapse within a few years as a result of security updates, increasing competition, or even the demise of the like economy. As a result, most were constantly looking for new opportunities. Arif, based in Jakarta, used his reseller business to boost his social media influencer account, which was his public persona and major source of income. Agus had developed a web-based travel agency that used advertising via several hundred Instagram accounts and fake ratings, together with collaborations with local tour guides, transport companies, and hotels, to develop a successful business focused on domestic tourism. Ahmad in Pekanbaru created a smartphone application for laundry pick-up and delivery and gamed the ratings for the app.

In particular, those who were older and more concerned with the near future—getting married and having children, for instance—attempted to develop business models that were more respectable and sustainable than selling SMM services. Hendro in Surabaya, for instance, was developing a soya milk business because he was betting on a general rise in lactose intolerance in the Indonesian population. Ana, one of a handful of women in the business, was a Balinese homemaker and former bank employee who had become a SMM services reseller when she had a baby. She spent a few hours a day selling on her laptop, but her long-term goal was to make enough money to set up a cookie and cake business out of her home. Some hoped to open their own offices focusing, for instance, on web design and social media management or to develop new ideas on Jakarta's media start-up scene. One invested in a 24/7 gaming center. Yohanes purchased a car that could be used as a taxi on ride-hailing platforms. Many, like Ibrahim, invested in a house as soon as possible, as well as secondary housing that could be subdivided into rental rooms (*kos*), or purchased land for long-term investment, while others focused on traditional offline businesses, such as laundry or shoe-cleaning services or shops that their parents or

relatives could run. It is thus critical to consider how the SMM services market is considered temporary by most of my interlocutors, and often seen as a stepping-stone to what appear to be more sustainable types of businesses. More generally, this perspective allows us to decenter a planetary focus on digital labor and consider that labor is embedded in particular urban environments and commercial spaces.

Conclusion

Engaging with the SMM services market from the perspective of my Indonesian interlocutors allows for a degree of reconceptualization with regard to the particular biases that have come to shape representations of click farms and digital sweatshops. First, while there is a degree of spatial concentration in the organization of these forms of labor—based in urban areas, organized through cottage industries such as Ibrahim's, and nationalized with regard to language—this must be understood in tandem with, and not in contrast to, spatially distributed forms of labor. More specifically, the distribution and organization of labor should be considered along a continuum that ranges from programming to the production and selling of SMM services, which at times allows for, but does not necessarily depend upon, a particular form of spatial concentration. Although "geography has become less sticky" in this process, as "the ties between service work and particular places" have been severed (Graham and Anwar 2018, 3), it is important to specify that a degree of stickiness remains that is shaped in particular political and sociocultural environments. This stickiness remains evident even in the case of Adi, who works strictly on the Indonesian market despite the fact that he lives in Amsterdam, as the colonial historical connections between the Netherlands and Indonesia (previously the Dutch East Indies) shaped his migration.

Second, the labor that underpins click farming is centered not so much on "clicking" as on developing forms of automation from below that decrease the reliance on manual labor. Importantly, the basic forms of technological innovation that have shaped the evolution of platform economies, notably the use of APIs, are also critical to the shaping of secondary industries that are dependent on but relatively autonomous about these platforms. Manual labor, however, remains critical, primarily with regard to customer service, marketing, copy-pasting itself, and occasionally clicking when automation breaks down. In other words, automation and manual labor should be approached not as opposed but as integrated in a patchwork fashion as the labor of kin and friends becomes critical in keeping the system running.

Third, although these sites of spatial concentration, for instance Ibrahim's, may be very well be termed farms or factories of sorts, the Indonesian case suggests that the

labor is not strictly exploitative or an end in itself for those involved but has more frequently evolved through play and tinkering, is organized along the lines of friendship or kinship, and is associated with broader aspirations. Although entrepreneurs such as Ibrahim keep the bulk of the profits, they often pay their workers relatively well. Rather than considering this as strictly a form of exploitation—a "sweatshop"—it is more productive to understand these as evolving but unstable forms of patron-client relationships that depend on certain forms of intimacy. However, these workplaces reveal as much about urbanization in cities like Jakarta, where kin and friends are drawn into new forms of economic engagement in an environment of precarity and experimentation, as they do about planetary digital labor (see Simone 2020). In other words, the combination of automation from below, shifting patron-client relations in the context of urbanization, and aspiration places us right in the middle of current debates about digital labor.

As Burrell (2012, 7) has noted in her ethnography of Internet cafés in Ghana, "Marginality can be defined as a position of relational disadvantage, of noncentrality but not absolute exclusion." This point allows us not only to nuance our understanding of click farming but also to move beyond "digital divide" as a defining concept for approaching the forms of labor, markets, and infrastructures that underpin contemporary forms of digital capitalism. More specifically, and in line with the theme of this book, an engagement with digital labor in a planetary market has much to gain by taking non-English-speaking communities in the urban Global South as an empirical starting point for analysis.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Instagram is a social media platform founded in 2010 and owned by Facebook. It allows users to share "posts" (photos and videos with accompanying text), which are then seen by their "followers" (users who have chosen to be notified when a particular account posts new content). With more than one billion users, Instagram has become a major commercial force (Leaver et al, 2020).

2. Most Indonesians neither have credit cards nor are able to use PayPal, which keeps them from purchasing directly on the international market.

3. See https://instagram-press.com/blog/2018/11/19/reducing-inauthentic-activity-on-instagram/ and Petre, Duffy, and Hund (2019).

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