

Call for Papers

From the Creative Industries to the Creator Economy
The Transformation of Cultural Production

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The production of cultural goods—such as books, music, films, and video games—has always followed a different logic than the production of consumer goods in general. Creative professionals are rarely employed for extended periods and typically work in project-based teams that require a high degree of flexibility and trust. Careers are therefore difficult to plan, and sustainable success is hardly predictable (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Menger, 2014; McRobbie, 2015; Manske & Schnell, 2018). Moreover, creatives have long been dependent on institutional gatekeepers such as publishers, labels, studios, broadcasters, and other distributors, who, due to their market power, dictate the conditions of production and distribution and often provide insufficient support (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

The rise of digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok has dramatically changed the situation for cultural producers. On the one hand, these platforms enable easy dissemination of content and direct communication with audiences, bypassing major intermediaries. Even amateurs can now address their fans directly with minimal resources (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2008). On the other hand, competition has intensified, and producers have entered new dependencies. Algorithms, which mediate between creators and users, are highly opaque, and monetization opportunities remain limited. Cultural and media work on these platforms is now subject to entirely new rules and constraints, which research has described as “platform governance” (Poell et al., 2022) or “isomorphism” (Caplan & Boyd, 2018).

The thematic focus of *medien & zeit* 1/2027 is on how cultural producers and creators navigate these new rules of the so-called Creator Economy. While public and scholarly discourse often centers on the negative effects of social media—such as fake news, hate speech, and internet addiction—the perspective of producers remains largely overlooked. Although numerous studies and several monographs on this topic already exist in the English-speaking world (Duffy, 2017; Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022; Hund, 2025), research on the Creator Economy in German-speaking contexts is still in its infancy, with only a few exceptions. For this reason, we invite submissions that address the *potentials, challenges, and constraints of this new form of cultural and media work*, particularly in German-speaking regions, from different perspectives in particular communication studies, media sociology, media history, media economics, or media ethics.

Possible areas of focus include, but are not limited to:

Continuity and Transformation of Formats. Platforms have not only created new opportunities for distribution but also new genres, formats, and modes of communication with audiences. Vlogs, Let’s Plays, and hauls may serve as examples from the early days of the Creator Economy, while dance challenges and lip-syncs represent more recent additions to the repertoire of digital media production. Creators’ self-conception has also changed, as they reveal far more about their private lives

than cultural producers of earlier times and often market themselves (sometimes alongside other consumer goods) as brands. Questions include:

- How do new forms of the Creator Economy differ from earlier media formats?
- How is creators' self-understanding changing?
- Can these diverse approaches to production be integrated into a professional biography (e.g., creators as book authors, actors as creators)?

Working in the Creator Economy. Income among creatives has always been highly unequal: a handful of superstars contrasted with a multitude of cultural workers earning little or nothing. This remains true in the Creator Economy (Budzinski & Gaenssle, 2018). Many creators invest months or years in platform activities before they can make a living—if at all (Duffy, 2017). Unpaid work is not only time-consuming and exhausting but increasingly merges with private life. Questions include:

- What economic risks and forms of precarity do creators face?
- How open, diverse, and accessible is the Creator Economy, and what forms of discrimination based on gender, origin, etc., persist?
- How does artificial intelligence transform creative work and competition?

Resources and Strategies. Another area of interest concerns the resources available to creators and the strategies they pursue. While platforms like TikTok integrate production technologies into their apps, making entry easier for beginners with limited expertise, established creators often use more sophisticated tools and receive support from agencies and informal networks. Questions include:

- Which resources and competencies are essential for a sustainable career in the Creator Economy?
- What forms of professionalization can be observed?
- To what extent do creators adapt their strategies to changing environmental conditions (new platforms, audiences, etc.)?

We welcome theoretical and empirical contributions on these and related topics in German or English. Abstracts (max. 500 words, including a meaningful title) outlining the intended contribution will be reviewed by the issue editors. Based on this review, authors will be invited to submit full papers (max. 7,000 words, including title, abstract, keywords, tables, figures, and references). All full papers will undergo double-blind peer review. During the revision phase following review, authors may extend their articles to a maximum of 8,000 words, considering reviewers' and editors' suggestions. *medien & zeit* is fully open access and does not charge authors any article processing fees (no APC).

Submission of abstracts: 31 March 2026

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Please send submissions by email: cfp@medienundzeit.at

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