

# The Emotional Economy in Social Media Platforms: An Analysis of Algorithm-Driven User Engagement and Commercial Value

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**Abstract.** With the rise of mobile Internet and social media, platforms have transformed emotions into key economic elements through algorithmic redistribution of attention. This study employs theoretical analysis to investigate how algorithmic mechanisms shape user engagement and convert emotions into commercial value within platform economies. The research aims to reveal both the benefits and risks of emotion-driven engagement. Findings indicate that emotionally charged content significantly enhances user stickiness, retention, and monetization through advertising and paid services. However, algorithms act not as neutral tools but as amplifiers of emotional responses, often reinforcing polarization, fostering immersive yet dependency-prone consumption, and generating risks such as the “outrage economy”. While these mechanisms strengthen business models, they also raise ethical, psychological, and societal concerns. The study is limited by reliance on secondary sources, suggesting future empirical and interdisciplinary research is needed to assess long-term impacts and to design governance strategies balancing commercial value with social responsibility.

**Keywords:** Emotional Economy; Algorithmic Recommendation; Social Media; User Engagement; Platform Governance.

## 1. Introduction

With the development of mobile Internet and social media, platforms have become the core space for users' daily communication and consumption. Unlike traditional media, social platforms not only spread information, but also accurately redistribute users' attention and emotional resources through algorithmic mechanisms, transforming emotions into captureable and tradable economic elements. This mechanism is reflected in a hybrid "attention-emotion" economic structure [1]. In this case, user behaviors such as likes, comments, and forwarding are not only part of social interaction, but also an important part of the platform's use of emotion amplification to obtain commercial benefits. Studies have shown that whether it is positive or negative emotional content, it will greatly improve the spread of information and user stickiness. The algorithm acts as an "accelerator" during this period [2]. On the other hand, the business logic of social media platforms is rooted in the attention economy framework. By recommending and pushing emotional content, it can extend user retention time and increase advertising click-through rate, thereby promoting the development of other monetization models such as membership subscriptions and virtual consumption. However, the expansion of emotions under the guidance of algorithms will also bring many risks, such as extreme emotions, information bubbles, and the "anger economy" phenomenon. How to consider the social responsibility assumed by enterprises and abide by ethical standards in the process of promoting commercial value creation has become an urgent issue to be considered. Therefore, this article will employ theoretical analysis, drawing on the core concept of the emotional economy, to examine how social media platforms shape user engagement through algorithmic mechanisms. It further investigates the dynamics of emotion-driven engagement and critically discusses the challenges such emotion-centered practices pose for sustainable value creation within platform economies.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study mainly covers four aspects: emotional economy, attention economy, platform economy, and user participation and value co-creation. Emotional economy emphasizes that emotions in the digital world are both individual psychological reactions and can be captured, amplified and transformed into valuable resources [2]. Social media platforms transform user emotions into the driving force of platform operations by identifying and utilizing emotions. Attention economy theory believes that in the era of information explosion, user attention is the most scarce resource. Algorithms will prioritize recommending emotional content to attract and retain users' attention, thereby increasing users' stay time and participation frequency, and completing the transformation chain from emotion to commercial value [2]. From the perspective of platform economy, algorithms are not neutral technical tools, but key mechanisms in platform design that affect content distribution, competitive advantage and value distribution [3]. By prioritizing the recommendation of emotional content, the platform subtly shapes users' usage and interaction patterns, thereby building an ecosystem driven by emotion. According to the theory of user participation and value co-creation, social media users simultaneously play the dual roles of consumers and value co-creators. Behaviors such as liking, commenting, and sharing are both ways of expressing emotions and key links in the platform's creation of commercial value. Emotionally driven interactions are constantly amplified by algorithms, enabling users to participate more deeply in the process of value co-creation.

## **3. Algorithmic Driven Mechanisms in the Emotional Economy**

### **3.1 Algorithmic Recommendation and the Emotional Amplification Effect**

Algorithmic recommendation systems are the foundation of social media sites. They precisely identify content that evokes strong emotional reactions and give it priority exposure by examining user behavioural data [4]. As a result, information's worth is increasingly determined by the depth of the feelings it arouses rather than just by its accuracy or reasoning. For instance, the algorithm is likely to recognise a post as having high interaction potential if it has aspects of emotion, surprise, or rage. This will allow the post to reach a larger audience. Under emotional excitation, resulting in increased platform data flows. Additionally, the system learns from users' emotional responses, which improves its comprehension of emotionally laden information. This mutually reinforcing cycle contributes to the platform's continued prosperity, but also weakens rational information and makes public opinion easily swayed by emotions.

### **3.2 Emotional Polarization and the Logic of Content Spread**

Social media, which is powered by algorithms, not only intensifies feelings but also makes them worse. Users are more likely to identify with information that is recommended by algorithms that is in line with their interests and preexisting attitudes. The "echo chamber effect" is the term used to describe the tendency for users to be exposed to more emotionally charged communications that support their opinions while being exposed to fewer messages that do the opposite. As a result, user divides and disagreements become more noticeable [5]. As a result, "maximising information" becomes less relevant in the logic of transmission than "maximising emotion." The more wrath, pity, or euphoria a piece of content arouses when it is shared and forwarded, the faster it spreads. Extreme narratives spread more easily than neutral or rational ones, resulting in public discussion becoming overwhelmed by emotional discourse. This logic has transformed the content ecosystem of social media and the way users perceive things. Driven by algorithms, public opinion has become volatile and fragmented.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Sentiment Modeling Technology**

The emotional economy is driven by data. Social media platforms track every user's activity on social media, including emojis, voice tone, and other data, to understand their emotional state. Platforms are now able to recognise emotions in text, photos, and videos thanks to developments in artificial intelligence and natural language processing. By combining past user behaviour data, these platforms can generate customised user emotional profiles. Algorithms that model emotions are able to both detect users' present emotional states and predict their possible emotional reactions, which enables proactive modification of recommendation tactics. For instance, the platform will automatically push comparable messages to increase the user's usage time if the model suggests that a user is more likely to be drawn to this kind of information. On the contrary, when the system detects that negative emotions can easily trigger user interaction, it may recommend more controversial topics, thereby increasing the activity of the platform[6]. Through this predictive feedback mechanism, platforms achieve fine-grained management and operation driven by emotional data. While emotion modeling enhances commercial value, it also raises significant concerns regarding privacy and ethical implications[6]. Users are digitized and labeled without their knowledge, and their emotions are constantly exploited and controlled. This has brought new requirements for platform governance and social supervision.

## **4. Analysis of User Engagement Patterns**

### **4.1 Emotionally Triggered Likes, Comments, and Shares**

Interactive behaviors on social media, such as likes, comments, and shares, are often not entirely rational choices but rather driven by emotional triggers[7]. When users encounter content that resonates with them, they are more likely to like it, expressing an immediate emotional response. This lightweight interaction becomes the first signal used by platform algorithms to determine the value of content. Comments represent a more intense emotional investment, as users express their emotions through text, seeking agreement or opposition in the interaction. Sharing is a higher-level emotion-triggered behavior, indicating a desire to reinforce a particular emotional stance through communication or to spread this emotion across social networks [7]. Algorithms act as amplifiers, collecting user emotional behavior and feeding it back into the system. The system then infers users' interests and preferences and then pushes similar or even more emotionally charged content. This cycle not only increases user interaction but also gradually cultivates a habit of "immediate reaction," making emotional triggers the dominant logic of user engagement.

### **4.2 Emotion-Driven Immersive Consumption and Its Risks**

Users are often enticed to consume immersive material by emotional cues and computational recommendations. Users are continuously exposed to new and emotionally charged content through news feeds, livestreams, and short videos, which make for a seamless viewing experience. Recommendation systems powered by big data encourage deeper user interaction on the site. Users are immediately prompted to seek out and interact with more related information when they feel joy, excitement, or empathy. Users become more devoted to the platform over time, and using it becomes a daily routine. In order to guarantee that content is always "just right," algorithms constantly improve their models. This increases engagement and opens up new avenues for value-added services and advertising. For example, social media platforms like TikTok and Facebook target users with advertising based on their usage and viewing habits.

But even though these same mechanisms increase positive participation, they also make negative feelings more likely to spread. Anger, worry, and discontent are examples of highly contagious emotions that drive people to share, discuss, and argue, so fostering the so-called "outrage economy." In the near term, this trend-setting behaviour may result in increased traffic and engagement, but there are serious risks involved [5]. Persistently experiencing negative emotions damages user wellbeing

and erodes trust. Additionally, overly sentimental speech can sabotage reasoned public discourse, intensify intergroup conflict, and possibly lead to problems in the actual world. If platforms rely too heavily on unpleasant emotions to engage users, they run the danger of regulatory scrutiny and harm to their brand.

Thus, while emotionally driven immersive consumption can maintain platform engagement, it can also potentially destabilize the social and psychological environment. The challenge for platforms is to design mechanisms that strike a balance between emotional engagement and maintaining a healthier and more constructive public sphere.

## **5. The Impact of the Emotional Economy on Business Value**

### **5.1 Advertising and Precision Marketing Monetization Paths**

Advertising monetization is one of the main economic approaches used by social media companies. Precision marketing has gained new momentum as a result of the emotional economy. To generate comprehensive user profiles, algorithms examine individuals' emotional preferences, past interactions, and consumption patterns. These profiles include psychological traits and emotional inclinations in addition to standard data like age and location [8]. Then, by properly targeting emotionally charged marketing content to their intended audience, advertisers may dramatically boost conversion rates and click-through rates. Ads pertaining to inspiration, health, or leisure, for instance, may be more likely to get a reaction if a platform notices that a user has been feeling upbeat lately. Advertisements that promote calming, venting, or impulsive buying may be more tempting to users who are classified as anxious or unhappy[8]. In order to improve ad targeting, platforms have moved from "attention monetization" to "emotion monetization." This is a crucial step in converting the emotional economy into commercial value since it maximises advertising efficiency and increases return on investment for advertisers.

### **5.2 User Retention and Willingness to Pay**

Emotion-driven mechanisms enhance user engagement and directly impact user retention and willingness to pay. Immersive experiences coupled with emotionally driven recommendations foster a psychological attachment among users, leading to increased usage. The platform has designed emotionally triggered interaction mechanisms, such as rewards for continuous check-ins, emotional emojis, and personalized content recommendations, to enhance user stickiness. This psychological attachment encourages users to remain in the platform ecosystem for the long term.

Emotions are also a significant driver of payment [9]. When users are emotionally engaged, impulsive purchases are more likely, including buying virtual gifts, signing up for memberships, and downloading paid content. Furthermore, platforms that create emotionally charged moments, such as creating tension or excitement during livestream interactions, can also increase user conversion rates. Emotions are not just a means of attracting users; they also drive spending and increase value, directly supporting the platform's sustainable business model.

### **5.3 Ethical Risks and Regulatory Challenges**

The emotion economy poses ethical and legal issues even if it has enormous potential to generate commercial profit. First, platforms may violate users' privacy by collecting data and modelling their emotions, which would allow users' emotions to be overused and deprive them the freedom to know and make their own decisions. Second, algorithms that magnify emotions have the potential to worsen societal polarisation by elevating unfavourable information and thereby jeopardising the stability of the public opinion environment [4]. Additionally, over-reliance on the "anger economy" or "anxiety-driven" paradigm in business strategies can result in a crisis of user trust and long-term social problems. Users may become resistant or perhaps stop using the site altogether if they believe that their feelings are being purposefully exploited, endangering its long-term viability. As a result, juggling business interests with social responsibility has emerged as a major platform governance

concern. In the future, regulatory agencies will probably steer the emotional economy in the direction of better growth by putting policies like increased data transparency, more stringent algorithmic audits, and more explicit content standards into place.

## 6. Suggestions

Platforms, authorities, and users must work together to strike a balance between business interests and moral obligations in order to guarantee the emotional economy's long-term growth. From the standpoint of the platform, future advancements ought to focus on creating more balanced recommendation systems rather than just increasing interaction. Algorithms should be improved to limit the overamplification of antagonistic or polarising content while promoting the spread of constructive or good sentiment. To lessen the possibility of an unhealthy "outrage economy," platforms may also test "emotional balance indicators" to track how recommendation systems influence users' emotional states.

Institutional frameworks need to adjust to the moral and social issues raised by emotion-driven involvement from a regulatory standpoint. Enhancing algorithmic openness, fortifying privacy safeguards for emotional data, and routinely auditing recommendation systems are some possible actions. In addition to aiding in the reduction of manipulative tactics, these programmes would steer the emotional economy in a more positive direction that is more in line with the interests of the general population.

From the user perspective, future research should pay closer attention to how individuals negotiate their autonomy within emotion-driven recommendation environments. Key questions include how users perceive emotional manipulation, the strategies they employ to cope with it, and the ways they resist or adapt to platform logic. Incorporating insights from psychology, communication studies, and human-computer interaction can deepen our understanding of how emotion-driven engagement affects both individual well-being and collective social dynamics.

## 7. Conclusion

This study examined the dynamics of the emotional economy in social media platforms, specifically how algorithmic suggestions convert emotions into engagement drivers and commercial value. According to the research, emotionally charged material, whether positive or negative, dramatically increases user stickiness, extends platform retention, and drives revenue through advertising, precision marketing, and readiness to pay. At the same time, the study emphasises that algorithms are not neutral instruments, but rather amplifiers of emotional responses, frequently reinforcing polarisation, boosting immersive yet dependency-prone consumption, and supporting phenomena such as the "outrage economy." While these processes improve economic models, they also pose ethical, psychological, and societal dangers, including as privacy violations, user manipulation, and the disruption of rational public discourse.

Despite these contributions, the research is limited by its dependence on theoretical viewpoints and secondary literature, which may not completely account for the diversity of user experiences across cultures and platforms. The lack of large-scale empirical validation further hinders this study's capacity to evaluate the long-term effects of emotion-driven recommendation systems on user trust and social cohesiveness. To solve these constraints, future research should use an integrative, empirical approach.

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