creative professionals are often encouraged to be increasingly present on platforms in order to reach their audiences. Consequently, they must adapt to the regulations of the platforms. This also applies to private individuals, who frequently utilize messenger and social media platforms for a significant share of their communications (Burgess 2021, 21; Eisenegger 2021, 17). In this context, the term platformization primarily refers to the potential for platforms to exert control over users and their data, as well as the content they consume and the social interactions they engage in. This control can be exercised through various means, including controlling access to the internet, monitoring and commodifying data flows and user actions, curating content, and initiating social activities (Eisenegger 2021, 22–23).

The term *platform society* has emerged in academic discourse where it is used to describe the growing influence of platforms in shaping economic and social processes. This concept emphasizes that platforms are an integral part of modern society, influencing both economic and social processes to a significant extent. The term platform society was first introduced by van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal in 2018, who argue that "platforms are an *integral* part of society" (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 2; italics in original). The authors suggest that both economic and social processes are increasingly influenced by privately organized platform companies. It is crucial to differentiate between the platforms themselves, on which active participants engage online, and the companies behind these platforms. It is evident that it is not the platforms themselves that establish the rules that potentially structure action in digital spaces but that these are defined by the responsible companies before they materialize in the interfaces and algorithmic systems of the platforms and influence the actions of users (Dolata and Schrape 2023, 2).

3.2 Functional Logics of Digital Platforms

The question of how platforms build their economic and cultural power is one that requires an understanding of the specific functional logics that underpin this process. These logics can vary in detail depending on the platform in question, but there are certain mechanisms that are constitutive of the anatomy of platforms in general. Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal state: "[A] platform is fueled by *data*, automated and organized through *algorithms* and *interfaces*, formalized through *ownership* relations driven by *business models*, and governed through *user agreements*" (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 9; italics in orig-

inal). This summary posits that the following aspects are central to the functioning of platforms: first, platforms continuously collect data that users leave behind in the course of using certain platforms and through their online activities in general. In order to filter and sort the vast amounts of data and make them usable, platforms use algorithms to automate these complex processes. Algorithms also help platform operators learn more about specific user preferences. For instance, users of media and social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook are consistently presented with a personalized selection of content. These suggestions are generated by algorithms, and users' responses to these suggestions in turn enable platform operators to learn more about their users' individual preferences and to further refine their personalized recommendations. In addition to its technical specifications, each platform also has a specific legal and economic status. This can be either a for-profit company or, less commonly, a non-profit organization. Furthermore, each commercial platform follows a specific business model, which may be based on the sale of data collected from users to third parties or on personalized advertising offers. In addition, platform users must always agree to certain terms of use and legal agreements in order to use the platforms. Such policies define, among other things, the rights of platform companies with respect to how they handle the user data they collect. According to van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, all these aspects must be taken into account in order to trace a specific "dynamic of platform-driven sociality" (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 12). In order to ascertain the extent to which certain platforms can influence users' actions, it is necessary to reconstruct the functional logics of the platforms and then relate them to the observable behaviors of their users.

In addition to the general functional logics listed above, the research literature on digital platforms also discusses other mechanisms that relate specifically to how platforms handle the data they collect, how they monetize that data, and how they select and curate content. At the core of this are the platform mechanisms of *datafication*, *commodification*, *selection/curation*, *personalization*, *reputation/trends*, *moderation*, and *terms and conditions*. Some of these mechanisms are closely intertwined and work in tandem.

3.2.1 Datafication

The term *datafication* refers to the process of extracting and collecting data about the usage behavior of human actors and social interactions in digital spaces. This data is collected by platforms, sorted, analyzed, and then used for

strategic purposes (Burgess 2021, 21–22). The collection of such data is realized through both software and hardware. The devices that users use to access platforms are equipped with software and applications that enable data collection. In essence, each mouse click or cursor movement made by an internet user can be utilized to generate, store, and subsequently analyze data about the user's behavior and preferences. In certain instances, this is accomplished through the use of social buttons or pixels that are integrated into websites outside the platforms, one notable example of this being the Facebook Like button (Burgess 2021, 9). In this manner, digital platforms are now capable of transforming a multitude of areas of users' everyday lives, about which they previously lacked substantial information, into data (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 32). While the collection of basic socio-demographic data such as age, geographic location, and gender for market research purposes is not a novel phenomenon, the data collected by platforms is characterized by a previously unprecedented level of detail (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 10–11). It is noteworthy that these novel methods of data generation and analysis were initially regarded as mere byproducts of the operational business of digital platforms. However, as platform companies gradually evolved into data companies, they began to view data as a prime resource (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 32).

In the context of datafication, it is of paramount importance that the data trails generated by platform users in the course of their online activities are highly standardized in technological terms. This is to facilitate the automatic exploitation and use of the data across platforms (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 35). The data generated is not used exclusively by individual platforms; it is shared throughout a larger network consisting of media companies, advertisers, and intermediaries. Concurrently, the platforms create statistics and rankings based on the data generated, which in turn are employed to determine which content to prioritize, thereby enhancing visibility and subsequently facilitating monetization (Burgess 2021, 23). Consequently, the mechanisms of data collection and exploitation by platforms can also influence the behavior of media companies and content creators active on these platforms. These actors depend on being visible on the respective platform and responding to market and platform demands. The metrics generated by the platform can be employed by content creators to identify promising content and subsequently devise effective strategies for its success.

However, the data that can be accessed by external actors, i.e., individuals and entities that do not work for platform companies, is subject to strict

control. The application programming interfaces (APIs) provided by platform companies, which allow for the controlled access to data generated in the context of the platform, play a key role here. The first API was introduced by eBay in 2000, and platforms are now equipped with APIs by default. Although content creators and media companies, for example, are provided with comparatively detailed information on the use and distribution of their content in the form of statistics, it is ultimately up to the platform companies themselves to decide to what extent outsiders are granted access to the collected data (Eisenegger 2021, 20).

3.2.2 Commodification

The business model of digital platforms is predicated on the collection and monetization of user data. By continuously monitoring user behavior, platforms gain access to detailed data that can be used to infer user preferences and behavior. However, observing a user's activities on streaming platforms such as Spotify or media platforms such as TikTok does not automatically indicate the user's current emotional state. Nevertheless, the platforms possess the capacity to observe user behavior in great detail and to establish connections between the content received and a multitude of situational factors that may influence the reception processes. Ulrich Dolata illustrates this process using the example of music streaming:

> The business of streaming services such as Spotify is based on the seamless and increasingly precise observation, evaluation and prediction of individual user behavior, which has become possible due to the enormous progress in digital surveillance technologies in the 2010s […]. Not only the search for artists or pieces of music, the playing, cancelling or skipping of songs, the creation of individual playlists and the adding or deleting of titles including date and time are automatically recorded. In addition, the platforms' collection of personal user data includes which playlists are listened to when and where, what is listened to at what times, and who exchanges information with whom. The collected and aggregated data go far beyond the creation of rather static profiles of individual users with comparatively stable characteristics (such as their basic music preferences). By increasingly including situational factors such as time of day, activity, location and environment in the data collection, it is now possible to create much more specific and context-related individual profiles that can be used, for example, to capture a user's various moods and music preferences at different times of the day or

> at different places. With all this, individual "data doubles" are created as a "reified, datafied version of the self" […], which not only track and map the activities and preferences of platform users over time but also form the basis for predicting future user behavior. All this is far removed from classic and rough group ascriptions of musical taste along broad categories such as age, gender, class or ethnicity, which radio stations have traditionally been using to design their programs, or music companies to structure their offerings. (Dolata 2020b, 13–14)

The collected data thus provides a certain amount of insight into the everyday structures of users and is available in enormous quantities. Consequently, the business model of platforms is based, among other things, on the "*commodification of user behavior*" (Dolata and Schrape 2023, 14; italics in original). The objective is to transform online activities into tradable commodities (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 37). As a result of their exclusive access to this data, platform companies are continuously driving the monopolization of the data economy that they themselves have initiated (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 37). In the daily operations of platform companies, a process of commercial measurement and valuation of private usage patterns and social activities is underway that would not have been feasible in this form prior to the advent of digital platforms due to the lack of suitable instruments for data collection and analysis (Dolata 2019, 183).

The business model of platforms is also characterized by the fact that a heterogeneous array of actors – including end users, advertisers, and service providers – come together within the platform context, often in pursuit of commercial interests with a high degree of intensity (Helmond 2015, 2; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 38). Multi-sided markets have emerged on platforms as a result. Prior to the advent of digital platforms, two-sided markets were prevalent in various media industries. This phenomenon can be exemplified by the news industry, which traditionally served as a mediator between readers or viewers and advertisers, typically in the form of print advertisements or TV commercials. Consequently, large media companies have historically wielded considerable influence in the realm of advertising, as they have enjoyed exclusive access to vast audiences with the capacity to disseminate identical content and messages in a remarkably brief timeframe. In the context of digital platforms, there are still individual and very large or economically powerful companies (see the Big Five), and end users and advertisers also interact on these platforms. However, social institutions and

non-corporate influencers also operate on platforms, as well as various players whose business model is based on processing the data collected by the platforms. The term *multi-sided markets* is therefore used to describe the economic interaction between heterogeneous actors in the same media environment (Nieborg and Poell 2019, 90).

3.2.3 Selection/Curation

The sheer volume of content available on various platforms makes it challenging for individual users to gain a comprehensive understanding of the resources available to them. To avoid overwhelming users and ensure a positive user experience, it is essential to pre-structure the content on these platforms in a way that presents users with a selection of content that is tailored to their individual interests and needs. Platforms are able to implement this approach on the basis of the collected data and the mechanisms for data evaluation. This results in a selection of content that is closely linked to datafication and commodification processes (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 40–41).

Platforms not only select content for individual users, but also help determine which topics and content are made visible to large numbers of users. This is exemplified by trends such as those that are commonplace on TikTok. Algorithmically controlled processes are partially responsible for the visibility of individuals and objects within the context of platforms. Cultural selection and hierarchization processes that were previously the exclusive domain of traditional gatekeepers such as journalists are now automated (Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022, 91–92).

Nevertheless, there are still human actors involved in these selection processes, at least to some extent. This is evidenced by the fact that algorithmic content moderation, at least in the field of music streaming (Bonini and Gandini 2019), is often controlled and supplemented by human curators. Curation on music streaming platforms thus cannot be assumed to be fully automated.

The curation of content reveals a paradox in the interaction between platforms and users. On the one hand, platforms provide a vast quantity of content, as exemplified by the advent of location-independent and almost limitless access to music through music streaming services. This was touted as a unique selling point to encourage consumers to use such services. Conversely, the advent of personalized listening recommendations meant that increasingly sophisticated selection and curation mechanisms were developed over time (Dolata 2020b, 16). These recommendation lists serve as a guide to

users so that they are not overwhelmed by the inexhaustible amount of choice on offer.

3.2.4 Personalization

The process of personalizing content is inextricably linked with the processes of datafication, commoditization, and, most crucially, curation as previously described. Users' reactions to the personalized content offered on platforms offer insights into the preferences and potential usage patterns of individual users, which in turn enable the collection of efficiently monetizable data. Content personalization is therefore a core mechanism, but the processes involved cannot be reconstructed in detail. This is primarily due to the fact that the functionalities of the algorithms that make these processes technically possible are trade secrets of the platform companies and are also subject to constant change, as they are continuously adapted in order to optimize functionality (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 41). Consequently, research on algorithmic logics is inherently constrained, as it is only possible in the most exceptional of circumstances to engage in discourse with those responsible for the technical development of platform algorithms (Bonini and Gandini 2019; Seaver 2022).

3.2.5 Reputation/Trends

Besides the personalization of content for individual users, another defining feature of platforms is the identification or creation of trends. This refers to content that spreads rapidly and often unpredictably on platforms, sometimes reaching enormous numbers of users. The factors that contribute to the emergence of trends on platforms are typically dependent on the number of users who interact with specific content within a relatively short window of time. This can include sharing, repeatedly consuming, or commenting on text, photo, or video posts. It can be argued that users exert a considerable influence on the virality of content. However, it is important to note that there is a previous step in which platform algorithms first decide which content is recommended to many users, and can subsequently evolve into a trend (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 41).

3.2.6 Moderation

The question of which content is allowed on platforms depends on the moderation policies of the individual platform. Moderation refers to the process of "*pre-screening, rejecting, removing, sequestering, banning, downgrading, or demonetizing content and accounts by platforms*" (Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022, 96; italics in original). Platforms determine which content can be uploaded and consumed, as well as which individuals or institutions are given the opportunity to upload or be active on the respective platform. The moderation strategies employed by platforms have repeatedly led to controversy. For instance, nudity has been considered worthy of censorship on numerous occasions, while populist or racist content or content inciting violence from private individuals or political splinter groups has often escaped censorship (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 44–45). Similarly to curation, these processes are not fully automated. Platform companies typically employ a significant number of individuals tasked with content moderation, whose role is to remove content that has been identified as being problematic. In addition, users are sometimes encouraged to report such content (Gillespie 2018, 262–63). For instance, Douyin, the Chinese equivalent of TikTok, is said to employ approximately 10,000 moderators whose role is to monitor uploaded content and ensure its compliance with the Chinese government's censorship regulations (Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022, 98).

3.2.7 Terms and Conditions

Although the precise criteria for content moderation are not publicly disclosed, sets of rules delineating what is and is not permitted on platforms are visible to the general public. Platform companies issue terms and conditions and community guidelines in which they define the social norms that all users must adhere to in order to avoid the risk of being excluded from a platform (Dolata and Schrape 2023, 8). The policies of the major platforms differ only slightly, with pornographic and violence-glorifying content, hate speech, and the depiction of drug use generally being prohibited. However, it is up to the platform companies themselves to define in detail what is to be deemed pornographic content and where the boundaries between pornography and sexualized – and therefore generally permissible – depictions lie (Gillespie 2018, 263–64).

These guidelines outline the way in which platform companies manage user data and the basic principles of user monitoring. Users must consent to

these policies in order to be active on platforms. Consequently, terms and conditions are of paramount importance, as they regulate both access to platforms and users' options for action, as well as the use of their data. On platforms, users therefore always encounter "*platform-specific rules of action*" (Dolata and Schrape 2023, 12; italics in original), which, according to Dolata and Schrape, can be characterized by four key features. Firstly, it should be noted that these rules are not open to negotiation; they are defined by the platform companies, creating a top-down relationship on platforms in this respect. Secondly, the rules defined by the platform companies translate into the interfaces and algorithmic structures of the platforms and form a technical set of rules that cannot be simply overridden and always fulfil the function of structuring action. Thirdly, the rules can be continuously changed and adapted by the platforms. Furthermore, the platforms monitor all user activities within the framework of their own rules (Dolata and Schrape 2023, 12–13).

3.3 Digital Platforms and Relations of Cultural Power

The preceding analysis has shown that platforms take on the role of accentuating actors in modern media cultures in a variety of ways. They can, in principle, influence economic processes as well as processes of social exchange and cultural production in digital spaces. On the one hand, platforms create new opportunities for interaction between, for example, creative artists, advertisers, and private individuals. On the other hand, these interactions are regulated by algorithms, interfaces, moderation guidelines, and terms and conditions. As a variety of processes, including private communication, the distribution of aesthetic objects, and product advertising, increasingly take place in a platform context, individuals, creative artists, and companies are compelled to establish an online presence on platforms and to adapt to the rules of the game to some extent. In many professional fields, self-presentation on various platforms has become a basic prerequisite for economic success.

For these reasons, platform companies are initially perceived as highly influential economic actors. However, their influence extends beyond the economic realm (Dolata 2019, 183; Gillespie 2018, 254). As van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal argue: "Platforms do not reflect the social: they *produce* the social structure we live in" (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 2; italics in original). Even relatively early relevant researchers have argued that platforms cannot be understood in a purely technical sense, nor exclusively as digital spaces of social