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The Deep Mediatization of Student Loans: A Case Study of Digital-based Lending Practice in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT The emergence of digital technology has significantly transformed the lending landscape. One example of the rising influence of digital lending practice targeting university students in Indonesia is Cicil. This digital-based lending platform provides a Peer-to-Peer (P2P) lending service that aims to cater to higher education students who have been frequently excluded from various lending programs. This study explores the deep mediatization of loans within the ecosystem of digital platforms and how it transforms lending practices, as provided by Cicil. Utilizing the concept of deep mediatization by Andreas Hepp (2020) and a case study method, this study reveals that the logic of digital media has been adapted to and transformed lending practices. The practices of lending are becoming driven by datafication and connectivity between loan providers, users, and the digital platform ecosystem, leading to a spatially disembedded financial transaction and generating a sense of participatory and inclusivity in lending practices.

KEYWORDS *Datafication; Digital Media; Mediatization; Online Lending; Student.*

INTRODUCTION

Taking up a loan to fulfill certain life necessities is a common practice in society. A loan can be understood as an agreement to borrow and repay a certain amount of funds within a designated time frame, involving either interpersonal relations or lending institutions (Dugas, 2015; Nugroho, 2001). Loan or lending institutions, therefore, have gained in popularity because they are deemed as 'saviors' for those in need.

In the digital age, lending institutions are providing digital-based services as part of fintech (financial technology) offerings. The development of the digital economy has significantly affected financial and banking services. Fintech companies embrace digital technology and employ technical and digital solutions to provide their services (Tanda & Schena, 2019). Access to financial services is increasingly mediated by digital media platforms, and various practices within the services have undergone changes. For example, the interactions between loans or lending providers and their users no longer need to be face-to-face; instead, media technology can facilitate such interactions. Furthermore, access to these services can be obtained at any time and from any location without the limitations of conventional office hours. Conventional financial institutions, such as banks and cooperatives, have also started to incorporate the logic of digital technology in their lending services. In Indonesia, this can be observed in the launch of digital-based loan products, such as BTPN bank's 'Flexi Cash' and BNI bank's 'Flexi Aktif' service. Similarly, e-commerce platforms, such as Shopee and Lazada, now offer credit facilities with installment options, like 'Shopee Pay Later' and 'Lazada Credit.' Among the various digital-based loan or money lending institutions is the Cicil platform, which targets higher education students in Indonesia, aiming to help them finance their education and other needs during their school life.

As stated on its website (*cicil.co.id*), Cicil is a lending platform owned by PT. *Cicil Solusi Mitra Teknologi*. Founded in 2016 by Leslie Lim and Edward Widjonarko, Cicil aims to address the financial challenges faced by higher education students in Indonesia. Recognizing the difficulties students encounter when seeking financial support due to strict requirements imposed by traditional lending institutions, Cicil introduces more accessible and flexible digital-based lending services. Unlike conventional loan providers that require users to provide detailed credit histories or proof of steady income, Cicil caters to the unique financial circumstances of students, who may lack the necessary documentation. The company's approach offers a fresh avenue for students to obtain the financial assistance they require, addressing the gaps left by conventional lending practices.

Until October 2021, Cicil has offered four lending services for students, namely, Cicil Barang [Installments for Goods], a loan for purchasing items through e-commerces or Cicil's vendor partners; Cicil Uang Kuliah [Installment for Tuition Fees]; Cicil Pulsa [Installment for Mobile Phone Credits]; and Cicil Belajar [Installments for Educational Courses], a loan for participating in paid training or courses off campus. Cicil's lending services do not provide direct cash loans to its users. Instead, Cicil acts as an intermediary or third party, facilitating the financial transactions between the users and the sellers or other parties involved. Cicil collaborates with universities and campuses across Indonesia to expand its reach. According to data from July 2021, Cicil has established partnerships with 260 campuses and had 7,041 student users spread across 58 cities in Indonesia (Cicil, 2021). To further promote its services, Cicil recruits students as part of its marketing efforts through a program called Student Ambassador, where ambassadors are placed on each campus to introduce Cicil's products to potential users. Additionally, Cicil offers the Cicil Jobs program, which provides work opportunities for users who face challenges in making their installment payments, and the Ajak Teman [Inviting Friends] program, which encourages active users to refer their fellow students to the platform.

Cicil's fintech lending services are integrated within a comprehensive digital platform ecosystem, which includes a website, social media platforms, an Android mobile app, and email. The adoption of this digital platform ecosystem has significantly disrupted the traditional lending practices previously carried out by non-digital financial institutions. Every stage of the lending process is now mediated and tailored to the capabilities of the various digital platforms.

This study investigates the deep mediatization of lending practices by Cicil, which are underpinned by a digital platforms ecosystem. The concept of deep mediatization, proposed by Andreas Hepp (2020), describes the advanced stage of the mediatization process in the digital era, where social worlds and media technologies are closely intertwined. Mediatization is not a one-way process where media solely determines aspects of social life; instead, it indicates the interdependence between media and everyday practices. This study examines how lending practices undergo deep mediatization through the adaptation of digital media logic and how this deep mediatization of lending practices transforms social relations and the practice of lending carried out by Cicil. In addition, this study also focuses on why such a transformation occurs in Cicil's case.

The existing research on digital-based lending practice primarily emphasized the legal, economic, and technical dimensions of fintech services. For instance, the research conducted by Istiqamah (2019) underscored the emergence of illegal electronic financial services in Indonesia. Istiqamah argued that the proliferation of Peer-to-Peer (P2P) lending institutions should be equipped with clear legal frameworks, which referred to the Indonesian Civil Code and the regulations of the Financial Services Authority (OJK). The legal instruments governing fintech were intended to safeguard the involved parties in the P2P lending practices and mitigate any potential harm resulting from these practices. In contrast to Istiqamah's study, Edi Supriyanto and Nur Ismawati (2019) demonstrated a more optimistic view of fintech services. They perceived fintech as an effective and efficient solution for individuals facing financial challenges in the digital age. Their research primarily focused on the use of technology and information systems, which supported the online lending process carried out by the fintech service providers.

The research conducted by Tran Dinh Uyen and Hoang Ha (2017) focused on the emergence of P2P lending in Vietnam. They examined this phenomenon as part of the sharing economy models, which was often referred to as collaborative finance. Through their survey research on financial communities in Vietnam, Uyen and Ha found that the sharing economy models, such as P2P Lending, were perceived not only as a threat but also as an opportunity for the traditional banking system. Furthermore, the researchers predicted that the rise of P2P lending would pose challenges for policymakers in Vietnam, as a new regulatory framework was likely required to address the increasing competition in the online lending services industry.

Other research on the online lending platform was conducted by Erga Kandly Panginan and Irwansyah (2020). They focused on Kredivo, an online credit application in Indonesia, and examined the impact of digital technology on financial transaction practices carried out by Kredivo. The study highlighted how the rise of digital technology has transformed transactions from cash-based to non-cash-based methods. The researchers emphasized the beneficial role of digital technology in enabling and streamlining everyday financial transactions.

The previous research on the influence of digital technology on lending practices has primarily viewed it as a one-way effect without considering the role of digital platform mechanisms in transforming financial transactions. These studies have positioned digital technology and everyday life practices as distinct and separate entities. In contrast, this study aims to explore the mediatization of loans in the digital era, investigating the interrelationship between digital technology and lending as a social practice and examining the role of platform mechanisms in the lending landscape. This study aims to contribute significantly to understanding lending practices by users in the polymedia environment and how the culture of connectivity that characterizes the digital era shapes and transforms social practices, including the case of lending practice.

METHOD

This study employed the case study method from Robert K. Stake (1995). The case study from Stake was selected because he offers a qualitative case study based on interpretivism, emphasizing the importance of reflexivity, which involves the production of meanings to the data collection to cultivate specific knowledge (Stake in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 443). As an interpretive study, a case study does not aim to deliver objective information or make generalizations. Instead, it offers a contextualized understanding of how individuals construct their own interpretations of reality. Consequently, the study's results pertain specifically to the objects or subjects within the defined scope of the investigation.

As explained by Robert K. Stake (1995), the case study is a versatile and adaptable method that allows researchers to comprehend and investigate the distinctive, specific, and intricate nature of the case under examination. Furthermore, case study enables researchers to make deliberate selections and highlight a specific phenomenon or issue from the case being studied in order to understand the nuances of the practices, activities, and interactions that occur within the case. In the context of this research, we explored the practices and experiences of users of Cicil's lending services operated by the digital platforms ecosystem. We focus mainly on examining the use of digital platforms and users' experience using Cicil's lending services, which operate with the digital platform ecosystem. Data collection was carried out using several techniques, including in-depth interviews with students as research participants, observations, and document analysis, in order to address research questions and objectives.

This study carried out an observation of the digital platforms ecosystem operated by Cicil, including the Android mobile application, website, social media platforms, especially Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, and email communication. The data collected from these digital platforms included verbal and visual information presented on the platforms' interface. To further understand how participants interacted and connected with Cicil as the lending provider and how they utilized Cicil's digital platforms during the lending process, this study also conducted in-depth interviews, both online and offline, with informants. Informants were recruited through social media invitations between March and April 2021. The selection criteria were: 1) students, any gender, actively engaged in Cicil's lending practices for more than a year, either as users or Cicil's partners, and 2) having experiences of working with Cicil, either through a work scheme of Student Ambassador, Cicil Jobs, or Ajak Teman [Inviting Friends]. The invitation resulted in four informants who provided their consent to participate in the study. To protect their personal data, the participants are referred to by their initials throughout the study. The four key participants were Fe (an active user and participating in Inviting Friends), Ta (an active user and Cicil's Student Ambassador), Da (a user, Cicil's Student Ambassador, and participating in Cicil Jobs), and Ed (a goods vendor). The data collection was conducted from May to October 2021. The collected data were subsequently organized, interpreted, and analyzed to address and answer the research inquiries.

DISCUSSION

Deep Mediatization and Media Logics

The concept of mediatization has been developed in line with the fact that media technologies have become an integral part of people's daily lives. Sonia Livingstone (2009) asserts that everything is mediated as a consequence of the development of information and communication technologies. According to Livingstone, there are hardly any parts of the world or any human actions that are untouched by media technologies. Scholars from German-speaking countries have coined the term "mediatization" to describe this phenomenon (Livingstone, 2009, p. 5). Andreas Hepp & Nick Couldry (2013) define mediatization as "the relationship between the transformation of media and communication on the one hand and culture and society on the other" (cited in Hepp, 2020, p. 4). In their view, mediatization is a two-way process where media practices are intertwined with socio-cultural practices outside the media. In this case, social institutions outside the media tend to align or adapt to the logic of the media.

According to Stig Hjarvard (2013), media logic is a term that is used to understand that media have particular characteristics and modus operandi. He suggests media logic as "a conceptual shorthand for the various institutional, aesthetic, and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which the media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules" (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 17). This media logic affects social forms of interaction, communication, and the relationships between parties involved in communication. Each medium has its own unique rationality rather than a single universal rationality underlying all media. In line with Hepp & Couldry, Hjarvard (2013, p. 17) asserts that the process of mediatization involves non-media institutions adopting the logic of media. For instance, religious institutions may incorporate the entertainment logic of television to package and deliver religious sermons or activities. In some religious gatherings, offering door prizes or playing quizzes becomes a way to attract attention and increase participant engagement, reflecting the adoption of media-driven entertainment logic.

In his work, Andreas Hepp (2020, p. 60) provides a detailed explanation of media logic. He explains three approaches to understanding media logic, namely, interaction, organization, and technology, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Approaches to Media Logic

Approach	Concept of Logic	Concept of Influence
Interaction	Forms of Interaction	Adaptation to Media Form
Organization	Organizational Rules	Adaptation to the rules of media organizations
Technology	Material Affordances	Adaptation to media's material affordances

Source: Hepp (2020, p. 60)

Hepp argues that the three approaches outlined in Table 1 should not be viewed as distinct and contradictory. Instead, these approaches often overlap because media can simultaneously be positioned as means of communication (related to the interaction approach), as institutions (related to the organization approach), and as techniques and materialities (related to technical apparatuses or media affordances). Examining the process of mediatization can be initiated by questioning the influence of media logic on social and cultural practices at both the individual and societal levels.

The development of platform-based media technology has given rise to a new phenomenon known as "deep mediatization," as argued by Andreas Hepp (2020). He defines deep mediatization as "an advanced stage of the process, in which all elements of our social world are intricately related to digital media and their underlying infrastructures" (Hepp, 2020, p. 5). Mediatization itself is not a linear process; it involves a wave of fundamental changes in the media environment. Hepp suggests that deep mediatization is characterized by a wave of digitization, which is the process of converting information into digital data and formats. This digitization is a continuation of the two preceding processes of mediatization: mechanization and electrification. Mechanization refers to the changes in media practice and distribution resulting from mechanical processes, starting with the invention of the printing press in the 1400s and continuing through the development of cameras in the 19th and 20th centuries. Electrification indicates the wave of changes in media practice that have occurred in line with the development of electronic media since the 20th century, beginning with the telephone, phonograph, radio, and television.

Digitization is marked by the rise of datafication, where social activities and human relationships are converted and analyzed as data. Media are becoming increasingly computerized, while non-media activities are equipped with digital technology and connectivity. The interconnectivity between various media is unavoidable, requiring the analysis of deep mediatization to consider the context of a multifaceted or polymedia landscape. According to Hepp (2020, p. 111), the process of deep mediatization is characterized by five key trends: digital media differentiation, increased connectivity, the ubiquity of mobile media technology, the acceleration of media innovation, and the increased datafication of societal processes. In the digital society, human interactions are intertwined with diverse media that are interconnected. People engage through media technology, share ideas via digital platforms, and act guided by digital databases. Deep mediatization not only means that many social domains are built upon media ensembles and digital infrastructures, but it also entails the transformation of individual and institutional practices.

Mediatization studies encompass two traditions: the institutionalist tradition and the social constructivist tradition (Hepp, 2020, pp. 7–8). The institutionalist tradition emphasizes the interrelationship between media institutions and non-media institutions. In this view, non-media institutions are increasingly adapting to media logic while also having the potential to counteract media logic and the media environment. The social constructivist tradition focuses on investigating media use and media production from the perspective of everyday life, highlighting the roles of media in constructing social and cultural reality. Researchers in this tradition investigate how social practices evolve and transform when entangled with media. This tradition also highlights the media's roles in a variety of social practices, conceptualized as 'institutionalization,' wherein specific communication patterns or social practices become stabilized and established, and 'materialization,' where media affordances materialize or give physical form to communication patterns and social practices across a variety of social domains. In this study, we position our examination in the social constructivist tradition of mediatization, focusing on how lending practices are transformed when entangled with the digital platforms ecosystem in the case of Cicil's lending services and how students as lending users experience such a transformation.

Mediatized Transactions in the Digital-Based Lending Practices

In providing its lending services, Cicil operated an ecosystem of digital platforms, which included a website, mobile application, social media platforms, and email communication. The website and mobile app served different but complementary functions, with the website providing general information and allowing users to apply for loans, while the app focused on user registration and transaction processing. Both platforms were designed with an attractive visual interface to present details about Cicil's lending services and procedures. Additionally, Cicil utilized social media platforms and email to communicate with the public and its users, sending promotional messages and updates. The integration of these various digital platforms demonstrated deep mediatization, as explained by Andreas Hepp (2020), where Cicil's lending practices were intricately intertwined with the use of multiple media platforms. The extensive use of digital platforms has become evident in the financial transactions and interactions carried out by the key participants as users of Cicil's lending services. The majority of these interactions and financial transactions were mediated through digital platforms, with physical presence and face-to-face interaction being largely eliminated from the lending practices, from registration and loan simulation to installment payment. Students, as the lending users, and Cicil, as the lending provider, were connected solely through these digital platforms, without any requirement for users to meet Cicil's management officers in person. The only in-person interaction that occurred during the lending practices was between the users and Cicil's Student Ambassadors, who were the users' campus-mates and were responsible for verifying the validity of new user registrations and installment applications.

Informant Fe, for example, mentioned that he never met Cicil's management in person, except with the Student Ambassador who happened to be his classmate (interview, 1 September 2021). The Student Ambassador was hired by Cicil and was tasked to verify Fe's application. When Fe made a purchase transaction, he could directly search for the item he needed through a marketplace and attach the link on the Cicil website to obtain financing. Likewise, the financial transactions, including down payments and installment payments, were mediated and could be made through ATM bank transfers, online banking, mobile banking, or cash payments at bank tellers, all in collaboration with Cicil. A similar process also occurred between Cicil and the vendors and e-commerce partners. Ed, one of the electronic devices vendors who collaborated with Cicil, stated that all interactions were done through the platforms, and he never met face-to-face with Cicil's representatives, as he shares,

> *I never meet Cicil's management team in person. Everything is handled through the app. It's simple, right? We can do business anytime, anywhere.*
>
> (Ed, interview 1 October 2021).

Such mediated financial transactions, as discussed by Stig Hjarvard (2014, p. 126), represent a form of direct mediatization. This refers to the process where activities that were initially conducted through face-to-face interactions are transformed into mediated activities. This transformation not only highlights the shift from non-mediated to mediated interactions but also encompasses a broader social transformation. In the context of Cicil's lending services, direct mediatization was evident in the transactions that are predominantly carried out through interactions mediated by digital technology. Starting from applying for registration, transactions, to loan payments, Cicil utilizes a digital platform ecosystem ranging from its own website, marketplaces, to online banking to reduce the need for physical presence and direct interaction between individuals.

The use of Cicil's website and mobile app for loan applications has demonstrated the adaptation of media logic in the interactions and lending transactions. Most websites operate with the logic of interaction, enabling one-to-many, one-to-one, and many-to-many interactions (Brun, 2013; Fuch, 2008). Additionally, the digital-based interactions involve both synchronous and asynchronous forms (Fuch, 2008, p. 128). Synchronous interactions refer to real-time relationships and interactions between technology users, while asynchronous interactions occur at different times or not in real time. The nature of the interaction on Cicil's website was initially one-to-many, where Cicil, as a non-bank financial institution, provided information to potential and existing users across Indonesia. However, when the user entered the loan application process, the interaction became one-to-one, involving only the user and Cicil as the provider. This one-to-one interaction was private and designed to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the user. Furthermore, the one-to-one interaction in the loan application process was primarily asynchronous or not in real-time, as it almost eliminated face-to-face interaction, with the process being mediated through digital platforms.

The Cicil's mobile app provided users with the ability to access services through their personal mobile devices. Mobile phones and smart devices have the unique characteristic of facilitating direct connectivity between the user and the service, a concept known as "direct human addressability" (Pence, 2013, p. 431). This is a reflection of the personal nature of these devices, as each mobile device is associated with a specific individual who owns it. By providing a mobile app, Cicil was adapting to the logic of personal devices, enabling the company to connect directly and privately with each user. This direct connection and interaction made possible by personal devices allowed Cicil to engage with users at any time without being constrained by the formal working hours typical of traditional banking or lending institutions.

Cicil maintained relationships and interactions with its users through various digital channels, including social media, mobile app, and email. These interactions were primarily one-to-many, where Cicil broadcasted information and promotional programs to its user base. The interactions via email and mobile app were more personalized and tailored to individual users. This personalization process adapted the messaging to the logic of personal devices, allowing Cicil to reach users with promotional information or reminders at any time of the day. Unlike traditional financial institutions with limited office hours, Cicil could expand its reach and availability by delivering information and loan offers to users anytime through their personal devices. As a result, users did not actively seek out information or contact the lending provider; instead, they received a constant flow of communication and promotions from Cicil without actively requesting it. The interactions and transactions between Cicil and its users were no longer bound by traditional office hours, as the boundaries between work and leisure have become blurred. By utilizing the direct addressability of personal devices, Cicil could streamline communication and reduce office bureaucratic stages, enabling more direct and targeted interactions with its user base.

Datafication of the Lending Practices

Cicil's adaptation to media logic also occurred at the organizational level, where, referring to Hepp (2020, p. 60), non-media organizations adjust their rules and regulations to align with the typical practices of media organizations. In the case of Cicil, this adaptation referred to the adjustments made by adhering to the rules and procedures commonly applied in media organizations. These rules pertained to the ways in which media entities organized their operations, utilized existing resources, and applied regulations to achieve their objectives. Given that Cicil's lending practices were facilitated by an ecosystem of digital platforms, this study underlined the way in which Cicil adapted the media organizational logic to its work mechanisms and its infrastructure organization to accomplish Cicil's goals.

Referencing the work of van Dijck et al. (2018, pp. 33–35), one of the platform mechanisms is datafication. Datafication involves the platform's ability to detect, organize, and quantify various digital practices by converting them into data. This process encompasses both the "capturing of user data" and the "circulation of that data." All user's activities and actions on digital platforms are not only recorded and transformed into data, but these data can subsequently be circulated and exchanged by the platform. This datafication mechanism is central to the configuration of platformed sociality. Van Dijck et al. (2018, p. 37) caution that corporations or platform industries do not merely collect user's data but also process, predict, and direct user's practices and activities based on this data.

In the context of Cicil, datafication was used to organize the lending services. All activities of Cicil's users were collected and recorded as digital data based on algorithmic mechanisms. Cicil utilized four interconnected digital media platforms consisting of Cicil's website, mobile app, social media, and email, to carry out data collection and organization across this ecosystem of digital platforms. The algorithms from these four platforms recorded all user's activities and their interactions with the platform interface, converting them into data.

Cicil's lending practices were basically based on data and information available through its digital platforms ecosystem. The company adapted to the logic of digital platform technology, where user activities were converted into data and algorithmic codes. Cicil no longer required direct physical interaction with users to build trust. Instead, all information and service usage procedures were presented in the form of data, both verbal and visual, mediated through digital platforms. As a result, the trust that underpinned Cicil's lending services was not built organically over a long period of time, instead relying on the data provided by users. Transactions on the Cicil platform, therefore, were primarily based on the data and information submitted and uploaded by users. The validity of the user's profile could be approved without direct physical proof, relying on trust and the adequacy of the provided information. The relationships between Cicil and users are built upon this data and information rather than personal closeness or historical narrative. According to van Dijck (2013, p. 12), relationships between individuals that are primarily based on data and information tend to lack depth and meaningful connections. The connectivity facilitated by digital platforms is often technical in nature, subject to regulations and potential manipulation. This suggests that the relationships fostered through such platform-mediated interactions may not be qualitative or deeply rooted.

Cicil relied on algorithm-driven datafication to assess the reputation and creditworthiness of its users. Users with a positive algorithmic track record tended to have an easier time obtaining higher installment limits and a more seamless process for making new installments. This data-driven approach was essential for Cicil to make well-informed decisions regarding its anticipatory policies and provide better service to its users. The data and information collected by Cicil through its platforms have become valuable resources for observing users without their knowledge. This new form of digital observation enables the platform to monitor individuals without physical presence, resulting in a 'data fusion' (Lupton, 2015, p. 96), namely, the large digital data sets that provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and enhance direct marketing strategies. The platform can obtain more precise and cost-effective insights into consumer behavior and preferences through clickstream analysis data or recording of the web users' online activities.

In the case of Cicil, the database of users was a resource that could be used to conduct the "pre-emptive form of observation." For example, as shared by informants Da (interview 20 August 2021) and Ta (interview 23 July 2021), Cicil could monitor their transaction histories, including their preferences for goods purchased in installments, the time between transactions, and the length of the selected installment periods, as they assert,

> *I once purchased a printer through Cicil's Installment for Goods. After that, I started receiving personal notifications about new types of printers from Cicil, like they persuaded me to upgrade my printer* (Da, interview, 20 August 2021).

> *Not long after I completed my previous installment, Cicil sent me notifications through their app. They don't want to let me free from installment plan* (Ta, interview 23 July 2021)

Referring to Lupton's (2015, p. 96) idea, information obtained from users allowed Cicil to set installment limits for future transactions and to send targeted promotional information related to installment programs that align with the user's preferences.

As more users interacted with Cicil's platforms, they were contributing to and expanding Cicil's data resources. The more active users, the more comprehensive Cicil's data became, which could then be exchanged for profit. For example, Da shared that he used Cicil's service of Installment for Goods to purchase a pair of sneakers and subsequently received personalized advertisements for related sports products through his email. He also received alerts on Cicil's mobile app to access Cicil's social media platforms and view Cicil's promotional offers. Similarly, Ta mentioned that she simulated an installment plan on Cicil's mobile app for a laptop but decided not to proceed (interview 23 July 2021). Afterward, she received personalized advertisements and promotions on mobile devices in her email. Cicil appeared to be utilizing users' data to carry out personalized advertising, namely the advertising practices that target specific consumers and use personalized messages, which are tailored to the preferences of the consumers concerned (see Dahlgren & Tabell, 2017; Nesamoney, 2015). Such data included not only the user's personal information but also data about their environment, such as location detected by the Global Positioning System (GPS). For instance, Fe was surprised to receive a personalized advertisement for an umbrella during rainy weather, indicating that Cicil could leverage location data to personalize its advertising. She shares, "I was surprised to receive a personalized promotion of an umbrella from Cicil in my email. At the time, I had been staying in my dormitory room for two days due to the heavy rain outside", (Fe, interview 1 September 2021).

In digital lending practices, the primary data involved was the user's personal data. This includes data voluntarily provided by the user, as well as data recorded on the platform. This user's data was used to identify and categorize individual users. The platform's algorithm then analyzed users' preferences, enabling Cicil as the lending provider to offer personalized loan options. This personalization was further supported by one-to-one interaction with the mechanism of direct human addressability. As users followed Cicil's guidance in carrying out subsequent transactions, users' activities were effectively directed and driven by the algorithms within the digital ecosystem used by Cicil.

Spatial Disembedding and Participatory Lending Practices

The lending practices by Cicil were no longer confined to a specific geographical location. All financial transactions conducted through Cicil platforms, from submitting installments to the payment, were not bound by physical space, allowing Cicil as the provider and students as users to engage without being physically present in the same place in real time. These activities could be carried out remotely and across distances. According to Christian Fuchs (Fuch, 2008, p. 128), the presence of digital technology enables various actions to experience "spatial disembedding," where they are separated from and not tied to a specific physical space. In the context of Cicil, its lending practices also underwent this spatial disembedding or delocalization. The lending transactions could be executed from anywhere, with Cicil as the provider and its users being physically separated and not necessarily connected in real time.

Apart from spatial disembedding, Cicil's lending practices were also relatively not bound by time limits. The company's financial services were accessible around the clock, blurring the distinction between work and leisure time. Digital technology enabled Cicil to intrude into various aspects of users' lives, with notifications and loan application capabilities available at any time, day or night. This suggests that Cicil's operations were not bound by the traditional boundaries of work and leisure, leveraging the capabilities of digital platforms to provide a seamless and ubiquitous lending experience.

The only time limit regarding Cicil's services that users could not negotiate was the schedule for installment payments. Informant Ta revealed that if a user fell behind on an installment payment, Cicil would promptly take action. Ta shares,

> *As an ambassador, I had the experience of being contacted by Cicil's local management, who asked me to reach out to a user who was behind on their payment. It was just a day late. I immediately followed up with the user to remind her to pay her overdue installment* (Ta, interview 23 July 2021).

In such cases, Cicil would directly warn the user and remind them of the payment due date. To discourage late payments, Cicil has implemented a fine system. Users who were tardy in making their installment payments were charged a weekly late fee of IDR. 50,000.00 (Da, interview 20 August 2021). Consequently, for users who did not make their payments on time, these accumulating weekly fines could become a significant financial burden.

Despite the potential burden of Cicil's fine system, the participants in this research expressed a positive view of Cicil's bureaucracy, describing it as flexible and uncomplicated. Participant Fe, in particular, praised Cicil's services, stating, "It's great using Cicil...you can do anything yourself" (interview 1 September 2021). Fe felt a sense of freedom in using Cicil's Installment for Goods, where he was able to select the items he wanted to purchase, the marketplace from which to buy them, the down payment amount, the installment tenor, and the payment method without Cicil's intervention. Cicil's lending practices allowed users not only to consume its services but also to actively participate in determining a lending scheme that suited their individual needs. This gave users a sense of freedom, as they were granted the space to make their own choices. In the context of contemporary commercial business in the digital era, this approach to positioning consumers is known as "participatory management" (Fuch, 2008, p. 149). This form of management is increasingly in demand and has shifted traditional hierarchical business models in the digital landscape. The key characteristic that often defines participatory management is the aspect of partnership. This partnership aspect was also evident in the relationship between Cicil, as the loan provider, and the students, as users. Cicil positioned itself as a "friend" of the students, ready to help them find solutions to their financial challenges. This "friend" positioning created a non-hierarchical impression, as Cicil placed itself in an equal position and demonstrated an understanding of the financial difficulties the students faced. Despite the rules and restrictions set by Cicil as a loan provider, users felt that Cicil's lending services were inclusive, enabling students with financial difficulties to access the services with relatively easy requirements.

In Fuchs' view (Fuch, 2008), workers in the production space enjoy a degree of autonomy, where they have the freedom to organize and execute their tasks as long as they comply with the corporation's established rules. Similarly, in the context of Cicil services, students as users also experienced a relative level of autonomy. Cicil allowed them to determine their own installment plans, including the selection of suitable services, down payments, and installment tenors. However, there were still rules and limitations set by Cicil, such as loan limits, financing margins, and interest rates that align with the chosen installment tenor.

Participatory management also employs an inclusive approach, ensuring that all parties involved feel valued and not subjected to undue pressure. This was evident from the accounts provided by the informants in this study. They felt embraced by Cicil, which not only offered flexible lending services but also supported them during their financial difficulties through Cicil's work schemes like the Student Ambassador program and Cicil Jobs. Regarding the Student Ambassador's role, participants Da and Ta acknowledged that Cicil gave them autonomy to set their own goals. If they wished to earn more discount vouchers to reduce their installment payments or receive substantial financial compensation, they had to be proactive. Cicil did not impose specific targets or compel them to actively promote its lending services. The Cicil Jobs program, meanwhile, provided a solution for users who struggled to make their installment payments. Under this initiative, Cicil connected its users with partner companies that were seeking employees or freelance workers. The income earned from Cicil Jobs was then used to pay off the user's installment obligations. It is unsurprising that students as Cicil's users viewed the company as a 'savior' that readily assisted them from the time of obtaining the loan until its final repayment.

Cicil's integrative approach was also well-received by its business partners. This approach involved collaborating with vendors, e-commerce platforms, marketplaces, and banking institutions. Ed, one of Cicil's vendor partners, shared that collaboration with Cicil has benefited his business in selling electronic devices, as he shares,

> *We have the same target: the students. That's why I often suggest to my customers to use Cicil's service. It's a win-win for everyone involved. The customer can get the items they want with Cicil's help, I can make a sale, and Cicil also gets their fair share* (Ed, (interview 1 October 2021)

For Ed, collaborating with Cicil is mutually beneficial. Such collaboration has allowed Cicil and its partners to expand their user base and share the benefits of the lending practice. A similar collaborative relationship was established with banking institutions. While these institutions initially considered the presence of fintech services as their competitors, partnering with Cicil proved to be a profitable option. In the case of Cicil, its services integrated with partner banks' virtual banking account systems, allowing users to conduct transactions through the banks' applications. This arrangement benefited the banks not only financially but also enabled both parties to share valuable users' data and information. As underlined by Fuchs (2008, p. 149), promoting teamwork and creating cooperative relationships are parts of the integrative approach to generating a sense of partnership. However, this integrative approach was intended to create the impression that work is fun and enjoyable while concealing the underlying competitive dynamics and political economy interests at play. It was evident that Cicil sought to flatten hierarchies, emphasizing collaborative relationships with its stakeholders. Likewise, Cicil portrayed its digital-based lending practices as fun and rewarding rather than acknowledging the potential challenges or burdens that were linked to these practices.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the lending landscape has undergone a significant transformation as digital media platforms institutionalize and materialize every step of the lending practice. Lending practices by Cicil, a lending platform targeting higher education students in Indonesia, have been adapted to align with the logic of digital platforms, encompassing technological, organizational, and interaction logic. The deep mediatization in the lending services offered by Cicil has resulted in a fundamental shift, where, firstly, lending activities were increasingly mediated through digital platforms and driven by algorithmic mechanisms and digital interfaces. To provide its lending services, Cicil has established an interconnected ecosystem of digital platforms, including a website, mobile application, social media platforms, and email, all of which work in tandem to facilitate the lending process.

Secondly, the lending transactions on the Cicil platform have become increasingly digitized and remote, minimizing the need for physical presence and face-to-face interactions. The entire lending process, from registration to loan application, verification, and installment payment, was conducted through the digital platform ecosystem. This shift has made lending practices more personalized and based on one-to-one interactions, which were regulated and adapted to the direct human addressability inherent in personal devices. As lending users, students are afforded the flexibility to structure their loan plans to align with their current financial circumstances while constantly being encouraged to participate in the lending activity.

In addition, the datafication of lending practices was a crucial part of the platform mechanisms, as every user's activity was recorded and analyzed as data. These data served as valuable resources for Cicil, enabling the company to formulate pre-emptive actions, such as assessing user's reputations, developing service promotions based on user's preferences, and organizing and regulating lending services for students in accordance with Cicil's goals.

The deep mediatization of loans by Cicil has transformed the lending practices that were traditionally conducted by conventional financial institutions such as banks and credit organizations. Cicil's lending practices were no longer based on hierarchical, face-to-face, and bureaucratic relationships but rather on inclusive, non-hierarchical, and participatory practices that required active and independent involvement from students as Cicil's users. The lending practices in the digital age have also experienced spatial disembedding, as the relationships and interactions between loan providers (Cicil) and loan users (students) were increasingly mediated through a digital platform ecosystem and were no longer tied to a specific physical location or to real-time interactions. Lending transactions could be carried out anywhere and at any time, with the loan or lending provider and its user being separated in space and connected only through digital platforms.

Cicil's business approach appears to have been integrative, aiming to create a sense of partnership with its stakeholders, including students as users and business partners such as vendors, marketplaces, and banks. The company sought to flatten hierarchies and emphasized collaborative relationships while concealing the underlying competitive dynamics and political economy interests at play. This study primarily focused on the relationship and interaction between Cicil as a loan provider and students as service users but did not delve deeply into Cicil's relationships with the business partners involved in its lending practices. As a suggestion for further research, it would be valuable to explore the political economy relationships between the lending provider and the various business partners engaged in the lending activities. Additionally, given that students are often excluded from conventional lending practices, further studies that examine the competition between digital-based lending services targeting higher education students are highly recommended.

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