

Digital Power and the Regime of Truth: A Foucauldian Analysis of Algorithmic Journalism

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ABSTRACT

Algorithmic journalism has transformed the Indonesian digital media landscape, creating a paradox between the democratization of information and the restriction of freedom. This study analyzes the phenomenon through the lens of Michel Foucault's theory of power, using a qualitative research method with a critical constructionism paradigm. The study of platforms such as Detik.com, TikTok, and Facebook reveals that algorithms operate as a "digital panopticon," monitoring and disciplining user behavior through biopower technology. Filter bubbles and algorithmic bias create a "regime of truth" that shapes digital subjectivity and controls the distribution of information. However, Foucault's concept of parrhesia offers strategies of resistance through digital literacy and self-management practices. This research contributes to understanding algorithms not as neutral technical instruments but as power mechanisms that shape digital social reality. The practical implications include developing algorithmic transparency regulations and strengthening public participation in technology oversight.

Keywords: Algorithmic Journalism; Digital Power; Panopticon

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought fundamental transformations, changing the way people access, process, and distribute information. One of the most significant changes in the information industry is the rise of algorithmic journalism, which automates various aspects of news production and distribution. This phenomenon raises critical questions about how technology shapes human subjectivity and regulates power relations in digital society.

Michel Foucault (1926–1984), a French philosopher known for his works such as *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976–1984), provides a relevant analytical framework for understanding this phenomenon. Foucault's concepts describe power as productive and diffuse, while his ideas on biopower and the panopticon offer theoretical lenses for analyzing how algorithms function as technologies of power in the context of digital journalism. Foucault's thought is well known for the concept of "power/knowledge," which emphasizes that knowledge is never neutral but always intertwined with power relations (Foucault, 1980). He also developed the concepts of "discourse" and the "regime of truth," which explain how social institutions create and maintain structures of power through the production of knowledge (Foucault, 1972).

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault's analysis of surveillance and discipline illustrates how modern societies use observation and normalization to control individual behavior. His concept of the panopticon has become highly relevant in contemporary analyses of digital technology and algorithms (Lyon, 2006). Furthermore, Foucault presents a complex view of human freedom within power structures. He does not see power as merely repressive but also productive. According to Foucault, individuals possess the potential to engage in "practices of freedom," even while operating within networks of power (Foucault, 1997).

In the context of algorithmic journalism, Foucault's perspective helps analyze algorithms not just as technical tools but as structures of power that shape public discourse and influence individual freedom in accessing and understanding information (Beer, 2017). Foucault's ideas can be applied to the issue of press freedom, particularly in understanding how power operates within media systems and how journalists can still find spaces for agency despite operating within certain structures of control. This perspective is especially relevant to algorithmic journalism, where the automation of news production involves complex dynamics of power and freedom for both journalists and the public.

This dynamic is shaped by the logic of algorithms that direct audience preferences. For example, platforms such as Facebook and Google News use behavioral data (clicks, shares, viewing time) to predict and limit news options. In Indonesia, the implementation of algorithmic journalism is visible across various digital platforms, including online news portals, social media, and news aggregator applications. Platforms such as Detik.com, Liputan6.com, Kompas.com, Tribun News, and social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter have integrated algorithms to optimize content distribution and user engagement. However, this practice also raises concerns about filter bubbles, algorithmic bias, and their impact on the diversity of information consumed by the Indonesian public.

This study examines how Foucault's structuralism and power theory explain the transformation of Indonesia's digital space. It investigates how algorithmic systems in journalism function as structures that limit or guide human freedom. It explores the impact of algorithmic systems not only on individual choices but also on broader

cultural and societal contexts. Furthermore, it analyzes how the growing use of digital platforms and AI-driven news automation affects human autonomy, particularly in editorial decision-making processes.

The significance of this study lies in its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches media and communication studies by incorporating Foucauldian perspectives into the analysis of algorithmic journalism. This approach opens new academic discussions by positioning algorithms as mechanisms of power that construct public discourse and regulate the flow of information (Gillespie, 2014). By adopting Foucault's framework, this research aims to critically examine how algorithmic journalism operates as a "regime of truth" that shapes social reality and influences how the public perceives news (Bucher, 2018). Practically, the study offers valuable insights for journalists and media practitioners, helping them understand how algorithms affect news production and distribution. It encourages media organizations to develop more effective strategies for managing the challenges posed by algorithmic control in the newsroom (Diakopoulos, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study draws from several key areas of thought, particularly structuralism, post-structuralism, and Foucauldian power theory. Michel Foucault is commonly associated with post-structuralism, although his relationship with structuralism is complex. In the early stages of his career, Foucault was influenced by structuralist approaches, but he later moved beyond these frameworks to become one of the key figures of post-structuralism. In the context of algorithmic journalism, structuralist perspectives allow us to understand algorithms as a new form of language that organizes the production and distribution of information. Eli Pariser's (2011) seminal work *The Filter Bubble* illustrates this phenomenon, showing how algorithms create information silos that trap users within limited narratives. These algorithmic structures restrict access to diverse information, shaping user subjectivity and limiting informational freedom.

Building on this, algorithmic journalism can be analyzed as a structure of power. Foucault (1978) redefined power not as something held by individuals or institutions, but as a productive and discursive relation that permeates all social networks. His framework provides five essential foundations for analyzing algorithms in journalism. First, power is a productive relation, not merely repressive, as it actively shapes subjects and produces knowledge. Second, power and knowledge are intertwined, where, as Foucault states, "truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it." This means that what is considered true is constructed through specific systems of power. Third, discourse plays a central role, as it shapes reality and subjectivity through dispersed practices of power. Fourth, the panopticon, a concept derived from Foucault's reading of Bentham's prison design, serves as a metaphor for surveillance mechanisms that create discipline through visibility and control. Lastly, Foucault

discusses subjectivity, or the processes by which individuals become subjects through specific technologies of power.

These concepts directly relate to how algorithms operate in digital media environments. The rise of biopower in digital technology further extends Foucault's ideas. Biopower refers to the management of populations through data collection and statistical analysis, a concept that resonates strongly in the digital era. Digital platforms collect extensive data on user preferences, activities, and interactions to enable content personalization. This process illustrates the modern manifestation of biopower, where algorithms do not simply monitor behavior but also predict and shape it. The extensive datafication of everyday life aligns with Foucault's notion of the panopticon, where digital surveillance becomes a pervasive form of control, subtly influencing user behavior and content consumption patterns in the age of algorithms. In this context, algorithmic journalism is not merely a technological innovation but also a mechanism of social control that impacts how information is produced, distributed, and consumed. By applying Foucault's theories, this study examines how algorithmic processes discipline both media producers and audiences, constructing new realities through data-driven decisions and shaping digital subjectivity in contemporary media ecosystems.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research method grounded in the interdisciplinary analytical approach of Michel Foucault, who explored the relationships between power, knowledge, and subjectivity in modern society. Foucault's methodology integrates elements from history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology to construct a deep understanding of how power dynamics operate within social structures. Inspired by this framework, the present research employs a critical constructionism paradigm.

According to Heiner (2013), critical constructionism emerges from the synthesis of two influential sociological theories: conflict theory and symbolic interactionism. This paradigm highlights the role of elite power in shaping the social construction of reality, particularly in how dominant groups influence the broader public through social processes. By using this perspective, the study investigates how algorithmic journalism reflects the power relations embedded in the digital media environment, specifically in the Indonesian context.

This research is conducted using qualitative methods, following an inductive approach as outlined by Neuman (2013). Empirical data are collected and analyzed to develop conclusions about the observed phenomena. The inductive process allows for a comprehensive exploration of how algorithmic systems, as mechanisms of power, construct and regulate information flows, impacting both journalistic practices and public perception.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Algorithmic Journalism as Digital Power

This study reveals the transformative role of algorithmic journalism in reshaping Indonesia's digital media ecosystem. Drawing from Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, the findings expose how algorithms have transcended their function as mere technological tools to become instruments of social power. In the Indonesian context, platforms like Detik.com, TikTok, and Facebook illustrate how algorithms control information flows, regulate user behavior, and create new regimes of truth.

The phenomenon of algorithmic journalism is not simply about the automation of news production. It embodies a broader sociological practice: the assignment of meaning to data. Algorithms determine what is visible in the media landscape and, therefore, shape public consciousness. This study identifies several key mechanisms through which algorithmic journalism influences digital subjectivity and societal discourse.

Automated News Generation and the Loss of Humanistic Nuance

Automated news production, or Natural Language Generation (NLG), is one of the most visible practices of algorithmic journalism. Platforms like Reuters and Bloomberg use AI systems to produce financial reports and market updates without human journalists writing the stories. In Indonesia, news outlets such as Detik.com and Kompas.com also experiment with content automation, especially for breaking news and data-driven reporting.

From a Foucauldian perspective, this automation process imposes a form of discipline on journalism. The algorithms dictate what constitutes "newsworthiness" based on quantitative metrics such as click-through rates and user engagement. As a result, journalistic work is reduced to overseeing the machine output, functioning more as an editorial checkpoint than as a creative, investigative process. This shift raises concerns about the erosion of journalistic depth and humanistic nuance. The content produced is technically efficient but often lacks the interpretative richness that human journalists provide. Furthermore, questions about accountability, accuracy, and bias in AI-generated content remain unresolved.

Personalized News Distribution and Filter Bubbles

Another significant finding involves the algorithmic personalization of news delivery. Recommendation systems, such as those implemented by Google News, Facebook, and TikTok, create hyper-personalized news feeds based on user behavior—likes, shares, clicks, watch time, and search history. TikTok's For You Page (FYP), for example, exemplifies an extreme form of content personalization. The platform continuously analyzes user interactions to present content tailored to individual preferences.

While personalization can enhance user experience, it also leads to the formation of filter bubbles and echo chambers. Users are repeatedly exposed to similar types of content, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. In the Indonesian media landscape, this dynamic manifests in news consumption patterns that amplify political polarization and social fragmentation. For instance, users interested in political news receive an overabundance of political content, while entertainment-focused users are rarely presented with critical societal issues. This segmentation of content consumption restricts the public's ability to engage with the full spectrum of news and discourse.

The Role of Algorithmic Platforms In Indonesia

Platforms like Detik.com, Tribun News, and Liputan6.com actively deploy recommendation algorithms to increase user engagement. Detik.com, for example, optimizes content delivery based on categories frequently accessed by users, such as politics, sports, or entertainment. The system also prioritizes sensational and emotionally provocative content to boost click-through rates. This strategy mirrors the logic of attention capitalism, where the main goal is to retain user engagement for advertising revenue.

TikTok, now a major news consumption platform in Indonesia, uses advanced machine learning algorithms to monitor user interactions, from watch time to comments and shares. These data points feed into content recommendations, prioritizing short-form news videos that are visually engaging but often lack contextual depth. As a result, TikTok promotes a form of “micro-journalism,” where news is consumed in quick, fragmented doses that may distort complex social realities.

Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm further reinforces this trend by prioritizing content that generates high emotional engagement—often controversial or sensational news. This prioritization mechanism accelerates the viral spread of emotionally charged stories, sometimes at the expense of factual accuracy and balanced reporting.

Algorithmic Power as Panopticon and Biopower

The findings align closely with Foucault's concepts of the panopticon and biopower. Users know that their digital interactions are continuously monitored—every click, scroll, and share becomes data that feed the system. This self-awareness leads to self-regulation, a phenomenon Foucault described as internalized surveillance. Google News, for example, tracks user behavior to offer localized news recommendations based on geo-location data and search histories. In this system, the user becomes both the subject of surveillance and an active participant in their own digital discipline.

Additionally, the concept of biopower is evident in the ways algorithms manage populations by predicting and directing user behavior. Algorithms process demographic data and behavioral patterns to determine what content is most likely to engage specific audiences. This predictive function shifts the editorial power from journalists to mathematical models that shape public perception and consumption habits.

Tensions Between Structure and Agency

The study highlights an ongoing tension between structural determinism and human agency. Structuralism views individuals as products of larger systems, while Foucault emphasizes the dynamic nature of power relations. Despite the constraints imposed by algorithms, users still have opportunities for resistance and self-management. Practices such as using VPNs, blocking ads, or participating in alternative media platforms reflect acts of parrhesia—courageous truth-telling and self-care in the digital space. In Indonesia, movements advocating for digital literacy and algorithmic transparency are forms of this resistance. Initiatives like Siberkreasi and community-driven digital education programs encourage users to critically assess the information they consume and understand how algorithms shape their online experiences.

Algorithmic Journalism: New Forms of Power and Resistance

The findings also reveal that algorithmic journalism generates a new type of non-human editorial power. For example, during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, news platforms prioritized content based on engagement metrics. Articles such as “Jokowi Marah di Rapat Kabinet” received tens of thousands of clicks within hours and were pushed to homepage headlines. Meanwhile, less sensational but socially significant stories, like reports on poverty reduction, were buried on back pages. This system creates a feedback loop where public attention is driven by algorithmic logic rather than journalistic judgment. Foucault’s framework suggests that wherever there is power, there is also resistance. This study identifies forms of resistance emerging in the Indonesian digital landscape, including:

1. Alternative Media Platforms such as Mastodon, which reject mainstream algorithmic controls.
2. Digital Literacy Movements, educating the public about algorithmic bias and filter bubbles.
3. Transparency Advocacy, pushing for algorithmic audits and public participation in platform governance.
4. Care of the Self, encouraging users to practice digital detox or curate their own media environments to avoid overexposure to algorithmically-driven content.

Foucauldian Perspective vs Algorithmic Journalism Reality

To further illustrate the findings, the following comparison outlines the distinctions between Foucault's theoretical concepts of power and the realities of algorithmic journalism in Indonesia. The table highlights the shifts in how power operates, from the dispersed social relations described by Foucault to the concentrated, technology-driven systems managed by digital platforms.

Aspect	Foucault's Perspective	Algorithmic Journalism
Source of Power	Dispersed within social relations	Concentrated within technological platforms
Mechanism of Control	Normalization through discourse	Normalization through quantitative parameters (clicks, shares, engagement metrics)
Form of Resistance	<i>Care of the self</i> and <i>parrhesia</i> (truth-telling and self-management)	Demands for algorithmic transparency and public accountability

This comparison underscores the evolving nature of digital power structures. In Foucault's framework, power is embedded in diffuse social practices and discourses. In contrast, algorithmic journalism centralizes power within technological systems controlled by corporate platforms, where algorithms determine what information is visible based on engagement metrics and data analysis.

The mechanism of control has also shifted. While Foucault emphasizes the role of discourse in normalizing behaviors, algorithmic journalism relies on quantitative parameters such as click rates, watch time, and shares—to shape both media production and audience consumption. These parameters create a feedback loop that disciplines both journalists and audiences into prioritizing content that aligns with algorithmic preferences. Forms of resistance, however, still persist. In Foucault's terms, *care of the self* and *parrhesia* involve critical self-reflection and courageous truth-telling as acts of freedom. In the digital context, these practices manifest as public demands for algorithmic transparency, media literacy campaigns, and advocacy for ethical algorithm governance. Users and journalists alike are beginning to question the opaque nature of algorithmic systems, seeking greater accountability from tech platforms.

Despite its usefulness, the Foucauldian framework has limitations in fully explaining the complexities of algorithmic journalism. Foucault analyzed power as diffuse and relational, but algorithmic control is automated, opaque, and often driven by proprietary corporate interests. Unlike the classical panopticon, which is centralized, digital surveillance is distributed across platforms that simultaneously

monitor and predict behavior through pattern recognition. For example, TikTok's algorithm does not "watch" users in a traditional sense but instead analyzes millions of data points to predict user preferences. The system adapts content delivery based on these patterns, creating a predictive loop rather than a purely observational one. This shift from surveillance to prediction represents a form of power that extends beyond Foucault's original theories.

Moreover, algorithmic journalism involves multiple agents platform owners, advertisers, content creators, regulators forming a complex power network that cannot be fully captured by a panopticon metaphor alone. The case of media coverage in Papua demonstrates how low-engagement local news is marginalized in favor of high-engagement sensational content, driven by algorithmic systems and advertiser pressures.

The implications of these findings are profound for democracy, media ethics, and cultural discourse in Indonesia. The dominance of algorithmic logic in news distribution risks intensifying political polarization, promoting misinformation, and marginalizing minority voices. The commercialization of attention distorts public discourse, prioritizing engagement over critical information. Economically, algorithm-driven media reinforce market concentration, disadvantaging local media outlets and reducing journalistic diversity. The shift toward engagement-based content undermines traditional journalistic values, such as investigative reporting and public interest journalism.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of algorithmic journalism through the lens of structuralism and Foucault's theory of power reveals the complexity of digital transformation in Indonesia. Algorithms function not only as structures that regulate the production and distribution of information but also as technologies of power that shape subjectivity and manage digital populations. This study shows that algorithmic journalism creates a paradox between the democratization of information access and the restriction of freedom through filter bubbles and algorithmic bias. Cases in Indonesia demonstrate how platforms such as Detik.com, Liputan6.com, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook implement algorithms that significantly influence news consumption and public opinion formation. The structuralist perspective helps to understand algorithms as systems of signs that organize meaning, while Foucault's theory provides insight into how algorithms operate as a form of biopower, governing populations through data management and behavioral prediction.

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