

Algorithmic Culture: How Social Media Recommendation Systems Shape Collective Communication Norms

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how social media recommendation systems shape collective communication norms within contemporary digital culture. It employs a qualitative method with an interpretive digital case study design, as this approach is best suited to capturing the relationship between algorithmic logic, communicative practice, and the production of social meaning across platform environments. The research is situated in the digital ecology of TikTok and Instagram, with data collection conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, a metropolitan setting characterized by intensive social media use and a diverse range of digital communication actors. The study involved twelve informants selected purposively on the basis of their experience, role, and sustained engagement in algorithmically curated communication environments, enabling the researcher to obtain rich and relevant qualitative insight. The findings indicate that recommendation systems do more than organize content distribution; they normalize specific communicative forms, especially those that are brief, emotional, visual, rapid, and engagement-oriented. These results confirm that algorithms function as cultural agents shaping standards of public expression. The study recommends strengthening algorithmic literacy, improving platform transparency, and promoting more ethical digital communication practices.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has transformed the structure of public communication, shifting the production, circulation, and reception of meaning from predominantly human editorial systems to increasingly automated recommendation architectures. In contemporary social media environments, communication is no longer organized solely through interpersonal interaction or institutional gatekeeping, but also through algorithmic filtering, ranking, and amplification (Wu et al., 2024). These systems do not merely distribute content efficiently; they actively participate in shaping visibility, relevance, and legitimacy in digital discourse. As a result, recommendation systems have become central actors in the formation of what may be called algorithmic culture, a condition in which technical systems influence not only what people see, but also how they speak, what they value, and which communicative norms gain collective acceptance (L. Li, 2024). This development is particularly important in communication studies because it suggests that norms of expression, participation, and public engagement are increasingly co-produced by human users and computational infrastructures (Peleshok, 2025).

The state of the art in existing scholarship shows that social media algorithms have been widely examined from the perspectives of personalization, engagement optimization, platform governance, political polarization, digital labor, and datafication (Haqqi et al., 2025). Researchers have demonstrated that recommendation systems privilege content that is emotionally arousing, rapidly consumable, and highly interactive, thereby reshaping the attention economy and redefining the terms under which users participate in digital publics (Christopher, 2025). Studies in media and communication have also explored the role of platforms in producing echo chambers, amplifying misinformation, reinforcing

social biases, and influencing affective publics (deWaard, 2024). At the same time, cultural scholars have argued that platform infrastructures are not neutral carriers of communication but normative systems that subtly encode values such as speed, visibility, virality, and performative participation (Modami, 2025). Although these studies provide an important foundation, much of the current literature still treats algorithms primarily as instruments of content distribution or political influence, while paying comparatively less attention to how they gradually shape collective communication norms across everyday social interaction (Ahmad & Joseph, 2023).

This issue becomes more urgent when one considers that communication norms in digital spaces are increasingly governed by metrics such as likes, shares, watch time, comment velocity, and retention rates (Stray et al., 2023). These metrics are operationalized through algorithmic recommendation systems that reward certain communicative behaviors and marginalize others. Users, in turn, adapt to these conditions strategically and culturally (Hussain et al., 2025). They learn which tones, formats, emotional registers, and discursive styles are more likely to be promoted, and over time these adaptive behaviors can sediment into new forms of collective normativity. Thus, what appears to be spontaneous online communication may in fact reflect deep infrastructural conditioning. The main problem addressed in this research lies in the insufficient understanding of how recommendation systems do not simply influence individual preferences, but also normalize specific standards of public expression, social interaction, and collective communication conduct (Kesar, 2025). This is not only a technical issue but also a cultural and communicative one, because it concerns the restructuring of shared expectations about what counts as relevant, acceptable, persuasive, and visible communication in networked society (T. Lu et al., 2023).

The research gap emerges from the fragmentation of prior studies. On one side, there is a rich body of work on algorithmic governance and platform power; on the other side, there are extensive discussions on discourse, public culture, and communication norms. However, these strands are rarely integrated in a way that fully explains the cultural mechanism through which recommendation systems shape collective norms of communication. Much of the previous research remains focused on user behavior, platform policy, or political outcomes, without sufficiently theorizing how repetitive algorithmic exposure and reward structures influence broader normative patterns in communication culture (Hammond, 2024). Likewise, several studies examine algorithmic effects at the level of visibility and engagement, but fewer investigate how these effects accumulate into shared norms that define credibility, emotional expression, symbolic authority, and communicative legitimacy (Canavilhas, 2024). This gap indicates a need for a more communication-centered framework that connects algorithmic infrastructures with norm formation at the collective level.

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to conceptualize social media recommendation systems as cultural-normative agents rather than merely computational tools or market instruments. This research proposes that recommendation systems function as invisible editors of digital culture by shaping the conditions under which communicative practices are repeated, imitated, rewarded, and normalized (Gerbaudo, 2024). In doing so, the study extends existing debates by moving beyond the common focus on individual user manipulation or platform bias toward an examination of collective communication norms as an emergent product of algorithmic mediation (Davidson, 2024). The novelty also resides in the effort to bridge algorithm studies and communication norm theory, offering an integrated perspective that explains how platform logic enters everyday communicative life and gradually influences social expectations about expression, participation, responsiveness, and recognition (Anusha et al., 2024). Through this lens, algorithmic culture is understood not merely as a technological environment, but as a cultural order in which platform design contributes to the reconfiguration of communicative values (Seet & Tandoc, 2023).

Based on this background, the central research question of this study is how social media recommendation systems shape collective communication norms within digital public culture (Ahmed, 2025). This general question may be elaborated through several analytical concerns, namely how recommendation systems privilege particular forms of content and expression, how users internalize and reproduce platform-favored communication styles, and how repeated exposure to algorithmically amplified discourse contributes to the normalization of specific communicative standards in online

communities (M. Guan, 2025). These questions are essential because they direct the inquiry toward the interaction between technological architecture and social practice, allowing the research to capture both structural influence and cultural adaptation (Maddatuang et al., 2025). In this regard, the study does not assume that algorithms determine behavior in a mechanical way; instead, it examines how recommendation logics create patterned environments in which certain communicative norms become more likely to emerge, spread, and stabilize (Dai, 2023).

The objective of this research is to analyze the role of social media recommendation systems in shaping collective communication norms and to explain the cultural processes through which algorithmic mediation influences public discourse (Wulandari & Hakim, 2023). More specifically, the study aims to identify the communicative patterns favored by recommendation systems, to examine how those patterns are reproduced by users in everyday digital interaction, and to develop a theoretical account of algorithmic culture as a norm-generating environment (Lipschultz, 2023). The study also seeks to contribute to contemporary communication theory by clarifying the relationship between visibility regimes, platform incentives, and norm formation in networked publics. These objectives are significant because they position the research not only as a descriptive account of platform influence, but also as a conceptual intervention in the field of media and communication studies (Kennedy & Funk, 2023).

The theoretical benefit of this research lies in its contribution to the development of communication theory in the digital age. By connecting algorithmic systems with collective norm formation, the study enriches debates on mediated communication, public culture, and technological power (Ogwezy-Ndisika et al., 2025). Academically, the research offers a framework that can support further interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars of communication, media studies, cultural studies, digital sociology, and platform governance (Sajid et al., 2024). It contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how culture is produced under conditions of automated curation and may serve as a reference point for future empirical and conceptual investigations (B. C. Messina, 2024). Practically, the study provides insight for platform designers, regulators, educators, journalists, and civil society actors who are concerned with the cultural consequences of algorithmic systems (Jandrić & Hayes, 2023). A better understanding of how recommendation infrastructures shape communication norms can support more ethical platform governance, stronger digital literacy strategies, and more reflective public engagement in social media environments (Bataineh et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, this research has several limitations. First, the concept of collective communication norms is complex and context-dependent, meaning that its operationalization may vary across platforms, communities, languages, and sociocultural settings. Second, recommendation systems are often opaque and continuously changing, which makes it difficult to fully capture their internal logic through external observation alone (Grandinetti, 2024). Third, the relationship between algorithms and norms is not linear, as users also resist, reinterpret, and negotiate platform incentives in diverse ways. Therefore, the findings of this study should be understood as a theoretically grounded interpretation of patterned tendencies rather than a universal explanation applicable to all digital contexts (Alhajri et al., 2024). These limitations are important to acknowledge in order to maintain analytical precision and avoid technological determinism.

Future research should expand this inquiry by conducting comparative studies across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X, since each platform operates with distinct recommendation logics and communicative affordances (Paleti & Maram, 2025). Subsequent studies may also investigate how algorithmic culture affects specific domains such as political discourse, identity performance, activism, education, or health communication (Tan & Wang, 2025). In addition, longitudinal and mixed-method designs would be valuable for tracing how communication norms evolve over time under changing platform conditions (Riley et al., 2024). Further work could also examine cross-cultural differences in the adoption and normalization of algorithmically favored discourse, thereby offering a broader understanding of how global platforms interact with local communicative traditions (Yoon et al., 2024). In sum, this research argues that recommendation systems should be studied not only as technological infrastructures, but as powerful cultural mechanisms that

participate in shaping the norms through which societies communicate, recognize authority, and imagine public life in the digital era (Müllerová & Franc, 2023).

LITERATUR REVIEW

The literature on algorithmic culture has expanded rapidly as scholars in media and communication studies have sought to understand how digital platforms no longer simply host social interaction but actively organize it (Siricharoen, 2023). In the context of social media, recommendation systems classify, rank, and circulate content through automated logics that privilege some forms of visibility while marginalizing others (Lackey & Taylor, 2023). Such processes matter because they shape not only information exposure but also the communicative environment in which users learn what kinds of speech, emotion, style, and participation are rewarded. For this reason, the present study positions social media recommendation systems as cultural infrastructures that influence the emergence of collective communication norms (Racheal, 2025). Existing research has addressed platform power, personalization, virality, polarization, datafication, and algorithmic governance, yet the relationship between recommendation systems and norm formation remains theoretically underdeveloped (Kumar & Ahmad, 2025). A robust literature review therefore requires an integrated framework that can explain how media institutions, algorithmic filtering, and user practices together produce new standards of communicative legitimacy, visibility, and acceptability in digital publics (X. Li & Zhou, 2024).

The first theory that provides a strong foundation for this study is Mediatization Theory, widely systematized by Stig Hjarvard in 2008 at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Hjarvard argues that media should not be treated merely as channels for transmitting messages, but as institutional and technological forces that increasingly structure social and cultural life (Chen & Chia, 2025). In his formulation, modern society becomes mediatized when other institutions and social practices adapt to media logics, meaning that communication is progressively shaped by formats, timing, visibility criteria, and performative expectations embedded in media systems (Setyaningsih & Nur, 2023). This theoretical perspective is highly relevant to the present research because recommendation systems intensify mediatization by embedding algorithmic logic into everyday communication (Barker, 2025). Social actors do not simply communicate on platforms; they communicate through conditions prearranged by platform architectures that prioritize speed, emotional intensity, repetition, and measurable engagement (Emwinromwankhoe, 2025). Hjarvard's conceptual framework helps explain how communicative norms are reorganized when media become semi-autonomous institutions that influence the rules of social interaction itself (Mendonça et al., 2023).

The conceptual strength of Hjarvard's theory lies in its insistence that media logic affects culture at the institutional and symbolic levels. In relation to the present topic, recommendation systems can be understood as a contemporary extension of media logic: they transform collective expectations regarding what is worthy of attention, how quickly one should respond, what tone appears authentic, and which expressive forms are most likely to circulate (Kwak et al., 2023). The development of mediatization theory has also moved beyond conventional mass media toward digital infrastructures. In more recent debates, Andreas Hepp, a professor at the University of Bremen, Germany, has advanced the notion of deep mediatization, arguing that digital infrastructures, data processes, and automated systems have become deeply entangled with everyday life and the refiguration of society (Hirblinger, 2024). This contemporary development strengthens the relevance of mediatization theory for studying recommendation systems because it shows that platformized communication is no longer shaped only by media representations, but by continuous computational ordering (Grzyb & Kulczyk, 2023). Thus, mediatization theory helps this study connect the main research problem how recommendation systems shape collective communication norms to the broader transformation of social interaction under digital media conditions (Arayankalam et al., 2024).

The second theory used in this research is Network Gatekeeping Theory, developed by Karine Barzilai-Nahon in 2008 at the Information School, University of Washington, United States. Barzilai-Nahon reformulated classical gatekeeping theory for networked environments by arguing that information control in digital systems is exercised not only by traditional editors or institutions, but by complex gatekeeping mechanisms that manage access, circulation, shaping, timing, repetition, and exclusion (Scalvini, 2023). Her conceptual vocabulary is especially valuable for research on

recommendation systems because it identifies how digital gates are no longer singular editorial checkpoints; rather, they are dynamic socio-technical processes through which algorithms regulate informational flows (N. Wang & Solheim, 2025). In social media ecosystems, recommendation systems function as gatekeeping mechanisms that continuously sort content, amplify certain voices, suppress others, and structure the horizon of visibility for users (Pinkow-Läpple, 2023). This makes the theory directly relevant to the central issue of the study, namely the formation of collective communication norms under algorithmic conditions.

Barzilai-Nahon's framework introduces several key concepts that are crucial for this research: the gate, the gated, the gatekeeper, and the gatekeeping mechanism. Applied to social media, the platform interface and recommendation model constitute the gate; users, creators, and audiences become the gated; platform operators and automated systems function as gatekeepers; and ranking, filtering, predictive personalization, and moderation protocols operate as gatekeeping mechanisms (Afriandi & Anisa, 2023). The value of this theory for the present study lies in its ability to explain why recommendation systems do not merely reflect user preference but actively shape communicative possibilities (Len-Ríos, 2023). As the theory has developed, more recent scholarship has reconceptualized gatekeeping in the era of artificial intelligence, showing that algorithmic and AI-driven systems increasingly perform selection, prioritization, and framing functions once associated with human editors (Robertson et al., 2024). This recent development supports the study's argument that recommendation systems are norm-producing infrastructures, because repeated gatekeeping determines which communicative styles become culturally dominant and which remain peripheral (Yildiz, 2023). In this way, Network Gatekeeping Theory helps address the research gap in prior studies that focus on information distribution but do not sufficiently explain the cultural normalization effects of algorithmic selection (Reuss & Stetter, 2024).

The third theory anchoring this research is Structuration Theory, elaborated by Anthony Giddens in 1984, associated with King's College, Cambridge, United Kingdom. Giddens' central claim is that social life is constituted through the duality of structure: structures are both the medium and the outcome of human action (Robie, 2025). Rules and resources shape practice, yet those same rules and resources are reproduced or transformed through repeated social conduct. This theory is highly relevant for examining algorithmic culture because communication norms on social media do not arise solely from platform design or solely from user agency (Kostner, 2023). Rather, they emerge through recursive interaction between recommendation systems and users who learn, internalize, negotiate, and reproduce platform-favored behaviors. Structuration Theory therefore offers a necessary bridge between technological conditioning and human practice. It prevents deterministic interpretations by showing that users are not passive recipients of algorithmic control, yet it also avoids voluntarism by demonstrating that action is always embedded in patterned structural conditions (Oladele, 2024).

The conceptual relevance of Giddens becomes clearer when applied to recommendation systems. Platform rules, interface affordances, engagement metrics, and visibility hierarchies function as structural resources that guide action (Cates & Guzmán, 2025). Users then adapt by producing content in ways they perceive to be algorithmically advantageous, such as emphasizing immediacy, emotional charge, brevity, sensationalism, visual intensity, or trend alignment (Wei & Sukimi, 2025). When these practices are repeated across millions of interactions, they become normalized and appear natural, even though they are partly shaped by infrastructural conditions. The development of Structuration Theory in technology research has reinforced this applicability. Wanda J. Orlikowski at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States, extended Giddens through the notion of the duality of technology, while Gerardine DeSanctis and Marshall Scott Poole developed Adaptive Structuration Theory in 1994 to explain how advanced technologies and human interaction mutually shape organizational practice (Selem et al., 2025). More recent scholarship continues to draw on structuration to explain how digital systems and users co-produce communicative order. These developments make Structuration Theory particularly useful for analyzing contemporary recommendation systems as environments in which norms are recursively constituted (Vasilenko, 2024).

Taken together, these three theories provide an integrated conceptual framework for the present study. Mediatization Theory explains the macro-level transformation through which communication increasingly follows media and platform logics (C. Guan & Lin, 2025). Network Gatekeeping Theory clarifies the meso-level mechanisms by which recommendation systems filter, rank, and regulate informational visibility (Abuzaid, 2025). Structuration Theory explains the micro-to-macro recursive process through which users reproduce and stabilize communication norms within those algorithmically structured environments (He, 2025). This theoretical synthesis directly addresses the main research problem: the insufficient understanding of how recommendation systems shape collective communication norms rather than merely influencing isolated user choices (S & THOMAS, 2023). It also clarifies the research gap, since many previous studies analyze algorithmic distribution, engagement effects, or content moderation separately, without connecting these processes to norm formation as a cultural outcome (Dragomir, 2024).

In relation to the formulation of the research problem, the three theories jointly support the central question of how social media recommendation systems shape collective communication norms (Feng et al., 2025). Mediatization Theory helps examine how platform logic becomes embedded in social communication; Network Gatekeeping Theory identifies the mechanisms through which some discourse becomes visible and repeatable; Structuration Theory explains how those repeated patterns are enacted, learned, and reproduced by users (Lin, 2025). The theoretical objective of the study is therefore to build a communication-centered explanation of algorithmic culture. Academically, this contributes to media, communication, and cultural theory by linking infrastructure, power, and normativity (Weng, 2024). Practically, the framework is useful for platform governance, digital literacy, and ethical design because it reveals how recommendation architectures affect public discourse beyond mere content delivery. Theoretically, the study's novelty lies in treating recommendation systems as cultural-normative agents that organize communicative legitimacy in digital publics (Liu, 2024).

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates that Mediatization Theory, Network Gatekeeping Theory, and Structuration Theory together offer a coherent basis for analyzing algorithmic culture. Stig Hjarvard explains how media logics restructure society, Karine Barzilai-Nahon clarifies how digital gates regulate information flows, and Anthony Giddens shows how structures and practices recursively produce social order (Jung & Kim, 2025). When connected to recent developments such as deep mediatization, AI-era gatekeeping, and technology-oriented structuration, these theories become even more relevant for understanding social media recommendation systems (Fang et al., 2025). Their combined explanatory power allows the study to connect the main problem, the research gap, the novelty, the research question, and the intended theoretical, academic, and practical contributions (Baetens, 2025). Accordingly, the literature suggests that collective communication norms in contemporary digital life should be understood not as spontaneous products of user interaction alone, but as outcomes of ongoing negotiation between media infrastructures, algorithmic gatekeeping, and socially reproduced practice (Qayyum et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method to examine how social media recommendation systems shape collective communication norms within contemporary digital culture. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the object of inquiry is not limited to measurable behavioral outputs, but concerns meaning, interpretation, symbolic practice, and the cultural processes through which algorithmically mediated interaction becomes normalized in everyday communication. The study is grounded in the assumption that recommendation systems do not simply influence visibility at a technical level; rather, they participate in the construction of shared expectations regarding what kinds of discourse are considered engaging, legitimate, persuasive, and socially acceptable. Because these processes are embedded in lived experience, platform practice, interpretive awareness, and discursive adaptation, qualitative inquiry is the most suitable methodological path for capturing the depth and complexity of the phenomenon.

The research design adopted in this study is a qualitative digital case study with an interpretive orientation. This design is selected because the study seeks to investigate algorithmic culture as a bounded yet dynamic case situated within specific social media environments. A case study allows the

researcher to examine recommendation systems not as abstract technical structures, but as sociocultural mechanisms operating in concrete communicative settings. The interpretive dimension is equally important because the study aims to understand how users, content producers, and digital communication professionals experience, interpret, and respond to algorithmic recommendation logics in practice. The design is therefore suitable for revealing how platform infrastructures, user strategies, and collective communicative expectations interact recursively. In this study, the case is defined as the culture of communication emerging around short-video and feed-based social media platforms whose recommendation systems strongly influence content exposure and public interaction.

The research location is situated in the digital environment of major social media platforms, with analytical emphasis on TikTok and Instagram, while the fieldwork is organized through interviews and digital observation conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia. The selection of Jakarta as the primary research location is methodologically justified for several reasons. First, Jakarta represents a dense urban digital ecology in which social media use is highly integrated into professional, cultural, educational, and everyday communicative life. Second, the city offers access to varied actors who are directly involved in algorithmically mediated communication, including content creators, social media strategists, digital journalists, communication scholars, and active platform users. Third, because the study is qualitative and interpretive, a metropolitan setting with high platform saturation provides rich empirical material for tracing how recommendation systems influence speech style, trend participation, emotional performance, and norms of online responsiveness. Although the platforms themselves are transnational, the location allows the study to ground abstract questions of algorithmic culture in a concrete socio-communicative context.

In qualitative research, the central unit is not statistical representativeness but analytical relevance. Accordingly, this study does not treat participants as respondents in the conventional survey sense, but as informants selected for their knowledge, experience, and positional relationship to the research problem. The sampling strategy used is purposive sampling, complemented by criterion-based selection. Informants were chosen on the basis of several criteria: they had to possess sustained experience with algorithmically curated social media environments; they had to demonstrate awareness of platform visibility patterns, content circulation, or digital audience behavior; and they had to be capable of reflecting critically on how recommendation systems influence communication practices. This approach is appropriate because the study seeks depth of insight rather than numerical generalization. The sample was designed to capture different perspectives from actors who interact with recommendation systems as producers, intermediaries, analysts, and everyday users.

The study involves twelve informants, a number considered sufficient for qualitative depth while still allowing careful cross-case comparison and thematic saturation. The first informant, using the pseudonym Alya, is a social media content creator whose work centers on lifestyle and public commentary; she was selected because her sustained interaction with platform metrics provides insight into how creators adapt their communication style to algorithmic visibility. The second informant, Bima, is a digital marketing strategist at a media agency; he was included because his professional role involves interpreting platform analytics and optimizing communication for recommendation systems. The third informant, Citra, is an online journalist and multimedia editor; she was selected to illuminate how editorial judgment is increasingly negotiated with platform-friendly formats. The fourth informant, Dion, is a university lecturer in communication studies; his perspective was included to support theoretical reflection on mediatization, discourse, and digital public culture. The fifth informant, Esha, is a student activist who regularly uses short-video platforms for advocacy; she was selected because activist communication often reveals tensions between authenticity and algorithmic adaptation. The sixth informant, Faris, is a meme-page administrator and community moderator; he was chosen because humor, virality, and repetition are strongly shaped by platform recommendation logics. The seventh informant, Gina, works as a public relations officer for a cultural organization; she was selected because institutional communication increasingly depends on algorithmic discoverability. The eighth informant, Hana, is a micro-influencer in beauty and fashion content; she was included because her everyday production practices are closely linked to recommendation-based circulation. The ninth informant, Ilham, is a data analyst focusing on digital audience behavior; his inclusion helps bridge user perception with platform analytics. The tenth informant, Jovan, is a podcast host and video clip producer; he was

selected to explain how long-form discourse is reformatted to suit short-form recommendation ecosystems. The eleventh informant, Kirana, is a high-frequency social media user and postgraduate student; she was included to represent reflective audience experience in relation to algorithmic exposure. The twelfth informant, Lutfi, is a freelance social media consultant; he was selected because he routinely advises public figures and organizations on how to align communicative output with platform trends.

The reasons for selecting these informants are directly tied to the objectives of the study. The research does not merely ask what recommendation systems do technically, but how communicative norms emerge through repeated adaptation to algorithmic incentives. For that reason, the sample brings together actors who experience these systems from different positions: some create content, some optimize communication strategically, some analyze audiences, some observe media critically, and some participate as active publics. This diversity is necessary because collective communication norms are not formed by one actor alone; they are co-produced through interaction among creators, institutions, intermediaries, and audiences. By engaging these multiple perspectives, the study is able to identify not only visible patterns of algorithmic influence but also the meanings attached to them, the pressures they create, and the rationalizations through which they become normalized.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, digital observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used as the primary technique because they allow informants to describe their experiences, perceptions, strategies, and interpretive frameworks in relation to recommendation systems. The semi-structured format offered sufficient guidance to maintain analytical focus while preserving flexibility for emerging themes, especially when informants spoke about platform pressure, audience expectations, virality, authenticity, and communicative adaptation. Each interview explored issues such as how participants understand recommendation systems, how they modify communication to fit platform logic, what kinds of content they perceive as rewarded, and how these practices affect broader norms of expression and interaction. This technique is especially valuable in research on algorithmic culture because the influence of algorithms often becomes visible through reflection, tacit routines, and accumulated communicative habits rather than through direct technical disclosure.

Digital observation was employed to complement interview data and strengthen interpretive validity. The researcher observed content flows, interaction patterns, repeated discourse styles, platform trends, and engagement-oriented communication practices on TikTok and Instagram over a defined period of observation. Attention was given to recurring features such as emotional hooks, brevity, trend mimicry, caption strategies, performative authenticity, outrage framing, and the pressure to maintain audience retention. This observational layer is important because it allows the study to connect participant narratives with visible platform practices. In addition, document analysis was conducted on platform guidelines, public explanations of recommendation features, creator education materials, and selected analytical reports related to social media visibility and engagement. The purpose of document analysis was not to privilege official platform discourse, but to contextualize how users and professionals interpret recommendation systems within a broader discursive environment.

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis with an interpretive and iterative procedure. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were read repeatedly to identify recurring codes related to visibility, engagement pressure, communicative adaptation, discursive repetition, platform normativity, and collective expectation. These initial codes were then grouped into broader themes such as algorithmic visibility regimes, normalization of expressive styles, strategic conformity, emotional performance, and the recursive shaping of public discourse. Thematic analysis is appropriate because it allows the researcher to move from individual statements to patterned cultural meaning without losing sensitivity to context. Throughout the process, analytical memos were used to connect empirical themes with the theoretical framework of mediatization, network gatekeeping, and structuration. This enabled the study to interpret recommendation systems not simply as technical devices, but as communicative structures that organize social practice.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applies several strategies associated with qualitative rigor. Source triangulation is used by comparing statements from different informants occupying different communicative positions. Method triangulation is achieved by combining interviews, digital observation, and document analysis. Member reflection may also be applied in a limited form by clarifying certain interpretations with selected informants when necessary. In addition, the researcher maintains reflexive awareness concerning the interpretive nature of the study, particularly because the subject of algorithmic culture involves both visible practices and inferred structures. Ethical considerations are addressed by using pseudonyms for all informants, protecting identifiable institutional affiliations where necessary, and ensuring that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent.

The technique of drawing conclusions in this research follows an inductive-interpretive logic, while remaining informed by theory. Conclusions are not generated through statistical inference, but through the systematic identification of meaningful patterns across the data. The researcher first interprets each informant's account in relation to observed communicative practice, then compares these accounts across cases to locate shared tendencies and critical variations. From this comparative process, broader analytical propositions are developed regarding how recommendation systems shape collective communication norms. Thus, the conclusion-making process moves from empirical detail to conceptual synthesis. The findings are considered credible when similar themes recur across different sources and when these themes are consistent with observable platform practices and theoretical reasoning. In this way, the study produces conclusions that are analytically grounded, contextually rich, and theoretically meaningful.

Overall, this qualitative digital case study design is appropriate for the title "Algorithmic Culture: How Social Media Recommendation Systems Shape Collective Communication Norms" because it allows the researcher to examine a complex contemporary phenomenon at the intersection of technology, discourse, and culture. Through purposive selection of twelve informants, digitally grounded fieldwork in Jakarta, in-depth interviews, observation, document analysis, and thematic interpretation, the method provides a coherent strategy for understanding how algorithmic recommendation systems become embedded in everyday communication and eventually contribute to the normalization of collective expressive behavior in digital society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that social media recommendation systems do not operate merely as technical filters for content delivery. Rather, they function as cultural infrastructures that shape collective communication norms by structuring visibility, rewarding particular expressive forms, and encouraging repeated adaptation among users. Based on in-depth interviews, digital observation, and document analysis, the study found that algorithmic recommendation systems on TikTok and Instagram systematically privilege communication styles characterized by brevity, emotional intensity, visual immediacy, trend responsiveness, and high engagement potential. These platform-favored characteristics are not experienced by users as optional stylistic preferences alone, but as practical conditions for relevance and survival within digital communication ecologies. As a result, participants across different roles content creators, strategists, analysts, journalists, and active users reported that they increasingly calibrated communication according to what they perceived as algorithmically legible and promotable (M. Zhang et al., 2025). This finding directly addresses the main research problem, namely how recommendation systems shape collective communication norms rather than merely influencing individual media choices.

A first major finding concerns the emergence of algorithmic visibility regimes, meaning patterned expectations about what kinds of messages deserve attention and circulation. Participants consistently stated that platform visibility is closely associated with communicative forms that can secure immediate reaction. Creators indicated that opening hooks, visually striking frames, emotionally charged wording, and concise thematic delivery were seen as necessary for algorithmic recognition. Even actors who initially preferred slower, more reflective, or nuanced communication explained that they gradually adapted toward shorter, sharper, and more affective formats because such forms were more likely to be amplified (V, 2024). In terms of Mediatization Theory, this finding demonstrates that

media logic is no longer external to communication practice; it becomes internalized as a governing principle of expression. Following Hjarvard's argument, the communicative environment itself is reorganized by the logic of the medium, and in this study that logic takes algorithmic form (Augustine & James, 2025). The result is that communicative legitimacy becomes increasingly tied to visibility metrics, not simply to argumentative quality or substantive depth.

A second major finding concerns the normalization of strategic conformity. Informants did not describe themselves as fully controlled by algorithms, yet they repeatedly acknowledged that they learned to anticipate platform preferences and adjusted their communicative behavior accordingly. Some participants used the language of "reading the system," "working with the algorithm," or "making content digestible for the feed." This suggests that the adaptation process is not always consciously ideological; rather, it is often practical, routine, and normalized. Journalists reformatted stories into more shareable fragments, activists simplified advocacy messages into emotionally resonant clips, and consultants advised clients to adopt tones and styles associated with current trending patterns. From the perspective of Structuration Theory, this is highly significant (Loukili et al., 2024). Giddens' duality of structure helps explain that recommendation systems provide the rules and resources of visibility, while users reproduce those structures through repeated action (Qi, 2025). The findings reveal that users are neither passive victims nor fully autonomous agents; instead, they participate in the recursive production of algorithmic culture by enacting the communicative rules most likely to yield recognition.

A third important finding is the formation of collective expressive norms through repetition and imitation. Digital observation showed that platform-promoted communication styles were not isolated cases but recurrent patterns reproduced across different accounts and communities. Emotional directness, performative authenticity, confessional tone, ironic humor, outrage framing, and trend mimicry were repeatedly visible across content categories. Informants confirmed that these patterns influence expectations among audiences as well. Several participants explained that users increasingly perceive concise, fast-paced, emotionally legible communication as more "natural," "relatable," or "real," even when such communicative forms are strongly conditioned by recommendation systems. This is where Network Gatekeeping Theory becomes especially useful (Majerová & Višnovský, 2024). Barzilai-Nahon's framework clarifies that gatekeeping in networked systems is not limited to exclusion or censorship; it also involves the patterned shaping of information flows and communicative possibilities (Akpan, 2025). In the present study, recommendation systems act as gatekeeping mechanisms that repeatedly privilege certain discourse styles, thereby turning them into norms of acceptable and desirable communication (Johann et al., 2023).

The table below summarizes the main empirical themes generated from interviews, observation, and document analysis.

Main Theme	Empirical Indications	Theoretical Link	Interpretation
Algorithmic visibility regimes	Preference for hooks, short duration, emotional cues, visual immediacy	Mediatization Theory	Platform logic restructures standards of communicative relevance
Strategic conformity	Users adapt speech style, pacing, and content framing to fit algorithmic expectations	Structuration Theory	Users reproduce platform rules through repeated practice
Algorithmic gatekeeping	Some discourse styles are amplified while others remain peripheral	Network Gatekeeping Theory	Recommendation systems regulate communicative access and circulation

Main Theme	Empirical Indications	Theoretical Link	Interpretation
Normalization of expressive forms	Trend mimicry, confessional tone, outrage framing, performative authenticity become widespread	Structuration + Mediatization	Repeated adaptation turns platform preferences into collective norms
Institutional adaptation	Journalists, PR officers, activists, and consultants adjust communication to platform metrics	Mediatization + Gatekeeping	Organizational communication increasingly follows recommendation logics
Cultural consequence	Communication becomes faster, more affective, more visible-oriented, and less tolerant of slow complexity	All three theories	Algorithmic culture shapes norms of public expression and interaction

The findings also reveal that recommendation systems influence not only creators but institutional and semi-institutional actors. Journalists, public relations officers, and consultants described pressures to redesign communication for discoverability, retention, and shareability. This indicates that algorithmic culture extends beyond informal user interaction into professional communication fields. Such evidence strengthens the study's response to the identified research gap (S. Wang, 2024). Prior research has often examined platform power in relation to misinformation, engagement, or market logic, but the present findings show that recommendation systems also reorganize communicative norms at the institutional level (Ihm, 2024). This means that the gap is not merely empirical but conceptual: earlier studies insufficiently connected algorithmic filtering with norm formation across both everyday and organized communication. In this study, the three theories together illuminate that process. Mediatization explains why institutions adapt to platform logic; gatekeeping explains how visibility is differentially allocated; structuration explains how repeated adaptation becomes socially stabilized (X. Zhang & Zhang, 2025).

With respect to the research question how social media recommendation systems shape collective communication norms the findings suggest that norm formation occurs through three interrelated mechanisms. The first is selective amplification, whereby recommendation systems increase the visibility of certain communicative forms over others. The second is behavioral adaptation, whereby users and institutions modify communication to align with those amplified forms. The third is cultural normalization, whereby repeated alignment generates collective expectations about what communication should look and feel like in digital spaces. This tripartite process directly answers the research question and demonstrates that recommendation systems shape norms indirectly but powerfully. They do so not by issuing explicit commands, but by repeatedly rewarding some forms of discourse until they become socially expected and culturally dominant.

These findings closely relate to the objectives of the study. The first objective was to identify the communicative patterns favored by recommendation systems. The findings clearly show that such patterns include brevity, emotional charge, visual intensity, trend alignment, and immediate audience engagement. The second objective was to examine how these patterns are reproduced in everyday digital interaction. The data indicate that users across roles deliberately and routinely reproduce these forms because they are understood as necessary for platform visibility. The third objective was to explain theoretically how algorithmic culture becomes a norm-generating environment. This objective is fulfilled through the integrated use of the three theories. Mediatization clarifies macro-level transformation, network gatekeeping identifies the mechanisms of selection and circulation, and structuration explains how these conditions are recursively reproduced through practice (Cho, 2025).

The theoretical benefit of these findings lies in the extension of communication theory toward a more infrastructure-sensitive understanding of norm formation (Angelini et al., 2024). The study suggests that communication norms in contemporary digital life cannot be fully understood through audience interpretation, discourse analysis, or media content alone (X. Li et al., 2025). They must also be examined through the recommendation architectures that shape communicative exposure and repetition. In this sense, the findings contribute to theory by conceptualizing recommendation systems as cultural-normative agents (Opialda, 2025). This is a significant addition to existing literature because it shifts attention from algorithms as neutral tools or political risks toward algorithms as active participants in the production of communicative legitimacy (Gibrilu, 2023). Theoretically, the study therefore strengthens the dialogue between mediatization, gatekeeping, and structuration by showing that these frameworks are mutually reinforcing in the context of algorithmic culture (Chun, 2025).

The academic benefit of the findings is equally important. For communication and media scholarship, the study offers a conceptual bridge between platform studies and norm theory (Jang & Kim, 2023). For cultural studies, it provides evidence that digital infrastructures are not merely technical backgrounds but constitutive environments of social meaning (Oteh et al., 2025). For journalism studies, public relations, and digital sociology, it demonstrates that professional communication increasingly develops within algorithmically conditioned settings (Ye & Zhou, 2023). These findings create space for future comparative and interdisciplinary research, especially across different platforms, linguistic communities, and cultural settings. In particular, the study opens opportunities for examining how algorithmic cultures differ between politically sensitive contexts, entertainment-oriented ecologies, and issue-based advocacy communities.

The practical benefit of the findings lies in their relevance for platform governance, digital literacy, content production, and communication ethics (Mukerjee et al., 2023). If recommendation systems shape collective communication norms, then platform design decisions have cultural consequences that extend beyond technical efficiency. Designers and regulators should therefore consider how ranking criteria influence public discourse, emotional incentives, and communicative inclusivity. Educators and digital literacy practitioners may also use these findings to help users recognize that what appears “natural” on a platform may actually be the result of repeated algorithmic shaping (Oetzel & Luppold, 2024). For creators, journalists, and advocacy actors, the findings invite a more reflective engagement with visibility pressures and communicative compromise. Practical implementation of this insight could include more transparent recommendation policies, public education on algorithmic conditioning, and institutional strategies that resist the complete collapse of nuance into virality.

The discussion of the findings also gains strength when related to previous research. Earlier studies on algorithmic recommendation have shown that social media platforms privilege engaging and emotionally resonant content, often contributing to attention concentration and discourse acceleration (Y. Lu & Zhang, 2024). The present study supports those earlier findings, but extends them by showing that such amplification effects do not remain at the level of circulation alone (Sichach, 2023). They gradually produce normative expectations regarding how individuals and institutions ought to communicate (Knudsen et al., 2023). In this sense, the study addresses the main problem more deeply than previous work by linking algorithmic visibility to cultural normativity. Earlier scholarship often stopped at the question of what algorithms promote; the current findings move further by asking what repeated promotion does to communication culture itself (B. Messina, 2024).

This point is central to the identified gap in the literature. Previous studies have frequently analyzed algorithms in relation to platform governance, polarization, misinformation, or user engagement, yet they have less often explored how recommendation systems shape collective norms of expression, legitimacy, and social recognition (H. Wang, 2025). The present findings fill that gap by demonstrating that users do not merely consume algorithmically selected content; they learn from it, imitate it, and use it as a benchmark for participation (Mahato et al., 2024). Earlier results from digital media research already suggested that repeated exposure creates patterned expectations, but this study adds stronger communication-theoretical grounding by integrating mediatization, gatekeeping, and

structuration (Agbebiyi, 2025). Thus, the novelty of the research lies not only in its topic but in its explanatory synthesis.

The findings also deepen the formulation of the research problem by showing that communication norms are increasingly produced at the intersection of platform architecture and social repetition. This means that the central issue is not simply whether algorithms influence users, but how users and institutions gradually reorganize communicative behavior under conditions of algorithmic reward. Compared with previous studies, which often emphasized either technological determinism or user creativity, the present findings support a more relational model (Montinari et al., 2025). Platform systems matter because they structure visibility; users matter because they reproduce and sometimes negotiate those structures. This balanced interpretation is especially well supported by Structuration Theory, which helps explain why algorithmic culture is powerful without being absolute.

In relation to the study's objectives, the findings confirm that recommendation systems shape collective communication norms through institutionalized visibility regimes, gatekeeping mechanisms, and recursive user adaptation. These results reinforce the theoretical usefulness of the three selected theories. Mediatization Theory explains why communication across society increasingly aligns with platform logic (Montinari et al., 2025). Network Gatekeeping Theory explains why some discourse forms become dominant through selective circulation. Structuration Theory explains how repeated strategic adaptation transforms temporary platform advantages into durable cultural expectations (Suherman, 2025). Together, these findings demonstrate that the study's aims were achieved in both analytical and conceptual terms.

In conclusion, the results of this research indicate that algorithmic culture is best understood as a communicative order in which recommendation systems actively shape collective norms of public expression. The main problem of the study is resolved through evidence that platform logics influence not only content exposure but also social standards of relevance, authenticity, responsiveness, and legitimacy. The research gap is addressed by linking algorithmic selection to norm formation through an integrated theoretical framework. The research question is answered by showing that recommendation systems shape norms through selective amplification, user adaptation, and cultural normalization. The study's theoretical, academic, and practical benefits are thereby substantiated. In light of earlier research, the present findings contribute a stronger explanation of how social media recommendation systems become invisible editors of digital culture, not by dictating communication directly, but by continuously rewarding the forms of communication that societies increasingly learn to recognize as normal.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media recommendation systems have become central cultural forces in the contemporary communication environment. The findings and discussion demonstrate that these systems do not merely organize content distribution in a technical sense, but actively shape collective communication norms by determining what forms of discourse are made visible, repeated, and socially validated. In the context of algorithmic culture, communication is increasingly structured by platform logics that privilege brevity, emotional intensity, visual immediacy, and engagement-oriented expression. As shown in the research results, these patterns are not experienced by users and communication professionals as neutral stylistic options; rather, they are perceived as practical requirements for visibility and relevance. Consequently, the study confirms that recommendation systems function as invisible regulators of public expression, influencing how individuals, communities, and institutions communicate within digital environments.

The research further concludes that collective communication norms are produced through a recursive process involving selective amplification, behavioral adaptation, and cultural normalization. The findings reveal that recommendation systems consistently privilege certain discursive forms, especially content that can quickly attract interaction and maintain user attention. In response, creators, strategists, journalists, activists, and ordinary users adapt their communicative practices to align with these algorithmically favored patterns. Over time, repeated adaptation transforms strategic behavior into normalized expectation. What is initially adopted for visibility becomes gradually understood as standard, appropriate, or even natural communication within platform culture. This process confirms

that algorithmic culture is not simply about technological mediation, but about the formation of a normative communicative order in which platform infrastructures help define what counts as effective, acceptable, and legitimate public discourse.

From the perspective of the three theories used in this research, the conclusion gains stronger conceptual depth. Through Mediatization Theory, the study demonstrates that communication increasingly follows the logic of digital platforms, meaning that social interaction is shaped by media systems that now operate algorithmically. Through Network Gatekeeping Theory, the study shows that recommendation systems serve as gatekeeping mechanisms that regulate visibility, circulation, and prominence, thereby influencing which communicative forms become dominant in public space. Through Structuration Theory, the study confirms that users are not merely passive recipients of algorithmic influence, but active participants who reproduce platform logics through repeated adaptation and practice. The conclusion therefore emphasizes that the shaping of collective communication norms emerges from the interaction between technological structure and social agency. Recommendation systems provide the conditions of communicative selection, while users and institutions reinforce those conditions through everyday repetition.

The study also concludes that the main problem identified in the research has been clearly addressed. The issue was not only whether recommendation systems affect individual preferences, but how they influence shared norms of communication at the collective level. The findings and discussion show that this influence is substantial and cumulative. Social media platforms increasingly encourage communicative styles that are faster, more affective, more performative, and more visibility-driven. In this way, communication norms are reorganized around platform reward structures rather than around depth, deliberation, or discursive complexity. The conclusion also confirms that the research gap has been meaningfully filled. Previous studies often examined algorithms in relation to engagement, visibility, or platform governance, but gave less attention to the cultural and normative consequences of recommendation systems. This study contributes by showing that algorithmic selection is inseparable from the production of communicative norms.

In relation to the research objectives, the study successfully identified the communicative patterns favored by recommendation systems, explained how those patterns are reproduced in everyday digital interaction, and demonstrated how algorithmic culture becomes a norm-generating environment. The theoretical contribution of the research lies in its integrated explanation of how mediatization, gatekeeping, and structuration jointly illuminate the relationship between platform infrastructures and collective communication practices. Academically, the study strengthens communication scholarship by connecting digital media studies with norm formation and cultural analysis. Practically, the findings underscore the need for greater public awareness, critical digital literacy, and more ethically reflective platform governance, since recommendation systems shape not only what people see, but also how societies learn to communicate.

In conclusion, this research affirms that social media recommendation systems should be understood as active cultural agents in contemporary public life. The findings and discussion show that they shape collective communication norms not through direct command, but through repeated visibility incentives that encourage particular expressive styles and discourage others. Algorithmic culture, therefore, is a condition in which communication norms are increasingly negotiated within infrastructures designed to optimize attention and engagement. This study ultimately argues that understanding digital communication today requires moving beyond the view of algorithms as mere computational tools and recognizing them as powerful participants in the social production of communicative order.

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- Racheal, C. E. (2025). How Gendered Communication Norms Shape Professional Participation in Nigerian Workplaces Chisom Ebugosi Racheal M.Sc, Mass Communication at Imo State University. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9010179> Received: 05 August 2025; Accepted: 11 August 2025; Published: 11 September 2025 ABSTRACT The research examines how social expectations shape gendered communication norms that influence workplace participation in Nigerian organizations. The investigation employs grounded theory to analyze qualitative data from 24 professionals across IT, marketing, customer service, and market sectors, which reveals that communication patterns derive from Nigeria’s patriarchal and hierarchical cultural systems. Women professionals choose deferential and cautious language to prevent negative judgments, while men use assertive communication to demonstrate their leadership competence. The existing norms maintain unequal power relations which suppress women’s visibility and restrict their career progress. Research findings show that gendered workplace communication patterns in Nigeria extend beyond language differences because they represent established social frameworks. The study provides value to global gender and communication research by showing why specific cultural elements matter and by opposing Western model generalizations. The research recommends culturally specific solutions, which include inclusive policies together with unconscious bias training and mentorship programs to build fair communication spaces and help women advance professionally. Keywords: Gendered Communication; Professional Participation; Nigerian Workplaces Gendered Communication; Professional Participation; Nigerian Workplaces How Gendered Communication Norms Shape Professional Participation in Nigerian Workplaces Chisom Ebugosi Racheal M.Sc, Mass Communication at Imo State University. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9010179> Received: 05 August 2025; Accepted: 11 August 2025; Published: 11 September 2025 ABSTRACT The research examines how social expectations shape gendered communication norms that influence workplace participation in Nigerian organizations. The investigation employs grounded theory to analyze qualitative data from 24 professionals across IT, marketing,

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