

Between Visibility and Viability: Platform Capitalism, Algorithmic Editorial Adaptation, and the Sustainability of Indonesian Online Journalism

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the structural tension between visibility and viability confronting Indonesian online journalism under conditions of platform capitalism. Drawing on a qualitative secondary-data design combining critical thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis, the study synthesises scholarly, industry, and regulatory sources to interrogate how algorithm-responsive editorial strategies—SEO-driven production, clickbait headlines, multi-platform optimisation, and analytics-governed decision-making—reshape journalistic quality and newsroom autonomy in an emerging democracy. Anchored in a tripartite theoretical framework integrating Nick Srnicek's platform capitalism, Dallas Smythe's audience commodity theory, and Philip Napoli's digital audience economics, the analysis reveals that Indonesian newsrooms are caught in a structural paradox: adaptations securing short-term algorithmic reach and advertising revenue simultaneously deepen platform dependency, commodify journalistic labour, and marginalise public-interest and investigative reporting. The article theorises this contradiction as the "algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox," situating it within comparative publisher-bargaining literature from Australia, Canada, and Indonesia's own Presidential Regulation 32/2024. Findings indicate that Indonesia's 1999 Press Law and regulatory apparatus remain structurally inadequate to platformisation's scale, with implications extending to media policy, platform regulation, and the informational foundations of democratic communication. The article recommends a multi-track reform agenda combining regulatory innovation, newsroom-level collaborative infrastructures, and scholarship centring the Global South, where platform dependency and its democratic consequences are most acute.

Keywords: platform capitalism; algorithmic editorial adaptation; Indonesian online journalism; audience commodification; clickbait; press sustainability; digital audience economics

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary news media environment is no longer organised primarily around editorial institutions. Instead, it is increasingly configured by a small constellation of global digital platforms — Google, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok — whose algorithmic systems mediate the distribution, monetisation, and visibility of journalistic content (Dijck et al., 2018; Sadowski, 2020). Indonesia offers a particularly instructive case for theorising this transformation. With 185.3 million internet users and approximately 139 million active social media identities in early 2024, Indonesia is one of the largest and fastest-growing digital news markets in the Global South. The country's post-1998 reform-era media system, characterised constitutional press freedom but fragile regulatory capacity, now encounters platform logics that reshape editorial autonomy, revenue structures, and the conditions under which journalism can remain democratically consequential (Maharani, 2024; Suherman, 2025).

This article examines how Indonesian online media organisations adopt algorithm-responsive editorial strategies, how these strategies reshape journalistic quality and newsroom autonomy, and how platform capitalism restructures the economic conditions of media sustainability in an emerging democracy. The central argument is that Indonesian online newsrooms are caught in a structural tension between visibility and viability: the editorial adaptations required to secure algorithmic reach simultaneously erode the institutional foundations of public-interest journalism. To capture this contradiction, the article theorises the *algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox* as a way of making sense of how platform logics, although generative in the short term, are corrosive to the long-term conditions of democratic communication.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on platformisation, algorithmic governance, and Indonesian online journalism. Section 3 elaborates a tripartite theoretical framework drawing on Nick Srnicek's platform capitalism, Dallas Smythe's audience commodity theory, and Philip Napoli's digital audience economics. Section 4 sets out a qualitative secondary-data methodology combining critical thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. Section 5 presents four findings spanning SEO production, clickbait headline strategies, multi-platform optimisation, and analytics-governed newsroom decision-making. Section 6 introduces the algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox, situating it within recent literature on local investigative journalism and publisher bargaining regulation. Section 7 discusses implications for media policy, platform regulation, and democratic communication. Section 8 concludes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Platform capitalism and the platformisation of news

The term *platform capitalism* was popularised by Nick Srnicek to describe the rise of a hegemonic business model in which digital infrastructures enable two or more groups to interact and, in doing so, extract, analyse, and monetise data at unprecedented scale (Sousa, 2019; Srnicek, 2017). Srnicek identifies five ideal-typical platforms — advertising, cloud, industrial, product, and lean — and underscores that advertising platforms, especially Google and Facebook, leverage cross-subsidisation and network effects to consolidate monopoly power over the digital attention economy (Mandal, 2018). As Sadowski argues, these platforms deploy three interlocking mechanisms — data extraction, digital enclosure, and capital convergence — to instantiate novel forms of rentier capitalism (Sadowski, 2020). Quico demonstrates how Netflix-like platforms amplify this logic by tying consumer behaviour to data-intensive recommendation systems, a logic that now extends, in modified form, to news distribution (Quico, 2019). Steinberg, Zhang, and Mukherjee further call for the pluralisation of the concept into *platform capitalisms*, emphasising that state–platform–culture relations vary considerably across the Global North and South (Steinberg et al., 2024).

Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal extend this argument through the concept of *platformisation*, defined as the penetration of platform logics into news production, distribution, and consumption (Dijck et al., 2018). For Nieborg and Poell, platformisation renders cultural production contingent, because editorial decisions are increasingly driven by engagement metrics, audience analytics, and the optimisation calculus of large platforms (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). This contingency is particularly stark in Indonesia, where domestic outlets compete against each other and against entrenched oligarchic media conglomerates, while simultaneously depending on the very global platforms whose algorithms shape what reaches audiences (Fahadi, 2019; Taryana & Rusadi, 2025). Faedlulloh observes that Indonesian discourse on platform economics often oscillates between celebration of the "sharing economy" rhetoric and the reality of structurally unequal labour and algorithmic relations (Faedlulloh, 2021).

Effects on editorial autonomy and journalistic labour

Algorithmic mediation has significant consequences for editorial autonomy. McGregor and Molyneux, summing across recent literature, demonstrate that algorithm-personalised feeds narrow editorial scope, prioritise engagement-rich stories, and produce editorial decisions that are "performance-driven" rather than public-interest-driven (Hastuti et al., 2025). Trielli describes platforms, particularly Google, as a *machine editor* whose criteria differ from human journalists, producing latent tension and continuous negotiation between algorithmic values and professional journalistic norms (Trielli, 2025). Simon argues that the introduction of AI into news

intensifies platform power over both distribution and means of production, increasing structural dependency and reordering journalistic ethics around platform logics (Simon, 2022). Bell and Owen-type concerns about media concentration are echoed in Seipp's regulatory analysis, which suggests that platform opinion power now shapes the public agenda more than legacy oligopolies ever did (Seipp, 2024).

These shifts are not merely editorial but also labour-based. Drawing on the audience commodity tradition (Beverungen et al., 2015; Caraway, 2011; Fisher, 2012; Fuchs, 2012), scholars have argued that platform datafication converts audience activity into a commodity sold to advertisers, while users, journalists, and outsourced contributors perform work whose surplus value flows primarily to platform owners (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013; Gandini, 2020; Turow & Couldry, 2018). Beverungen, Böhm, and Land demonstrate that this audience labour is increasingly intertwined with managerial logics that treat user activity as productive work, fundamentally deterministic of the algorithms governing news flow (Beverungen et al., 2015). Livingstone cautions against overreach in this argument, noting the heterogeneity of audience relationships with platforms and the need to distinguish between data labour and the work of platforms in monetising it (Livingstone, 2018). Even so, Gandini shows that *playbour* and similar hybrid labour categories have firmly established journalism as a sector of intensified immaterial work (Gandini, 2020).

For journalists themselves, these platform dynamics produce heightened precarity. Rick and Hanitzsch outline a multidimensional model of perceived job insecurity that combines objective employment conditions with subjective sense of precariousness, particularly salient among freelancers (Rick & Hanitzsch, 2023). Gollmitzer shows that even in the Global North freelance and intern journalists function as "precariously employed watchdogs", structurally dependent on unstable income streams (Gollmitzer, 2014). Hayes and Silke find similar dynamics in the Irish freelance sector, where digital labour blurs the boundaries between employment and self-employment (Hayes & Silke, 2018). Miconi, Cannizzaro, and Risi apply the platformisation framework to European news during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how platforms intensified structural dependency among legacy media (Miconi et al., 2024). Da Silva and Rocha extend this line to Brazilian *jornalismo local plataformizado*, documenting how regional newsrooms are absorbed into the platform ecosystem on deeply asymmetric terms (Silva & Rocha, 2024).

Indonesian context: media system, regulation, and democratic conditions

Indonesia's post-authoritarian media system is characterised by constitutional press freedom but persistent structural vulnerabilities (Maharani, 2024; Suriyanto, 2020). The 1999 Press Law guarantees editorial independence and prohibits censorship, and the Press Council plays a quasi-regulatory role in upholding the journalistic code of ethics (Suriyanto, 2020). However, the rapid expansion of online media — the Indonesian Press Council recorded at least 68 officially registered cyber media by 2015, and many more operate unregistered (Susanto et al., 2020) — has outpaced the Council's institutional capacity. Harahap and Adeni document widespread violations of journalistic ethics in Indonesian online media, including clickbait, weak verification, and misinformation, driven primarily by economic pressures and platform algorithms (Indonesia et al., 2025). Maharani shows how the ITE Law routinely criminalises journalistic work, weakening the protective function of the Press Council (Maharani, 2024). Maulani and Soponyono further document digital-age threats including hacking, doxxing, and the weaponisation of the ITE Law against investigative reporters (Maulani & Soponyono, 2025).

Democratically, Indonesia's three-decade reform trajectory has stagnated under successive governments, with the Jokowi presidency associated with a measurable decline in civil liberties, increasing political polarisation, and the erosion of checks and balances (Arifin et al., 2022; Asrinaldi & Yusoff, 2023; Jh. & Jh., 2020; Mietzner, 2011, 2020). Arifin and colleagues note that civil liberties stagnated at 5.59 points on the EIU index between 2018 and 2019, and that the Alliance of Independent Journalists routinely reports dozens of assaults and threats against media workers (Arifin et al., 2022). These conditions create a press freedom environment in which platform regulation becomes doubly important: not only do platforms substitute for direct state censorship, but they also marginalise the kind of investigative reporting that documents democratic backsliding (Suherman, 2025).

Within this environment, Indonesian online media have pursued multiple revenue strategies but continue to face structural fragility. Masduki and colleagues observe that business models for Indonesian digital news "remain

unstandardized" and that the prevailing expectation of free news consumption, combined with platform competition, undermines viability (Masduki et al., 2024). Oktavianti shows that small and medium-sized Indonesian newsrooms face acute revenue pressure and increasingly accept client-driven editorial strategies — including bundling, minimal gatekeeping, and identical content distribution across platforms — to remain solvent (Oktavianti, 2026; Oktavianti et al., 2024). Parahita and Pamungkas find that both conglomerates and digital-native startups monetise user participation, content, and expertise, but that revenue diversification remains fragile (Parahita & PAMUNGKAS, 2023). Mutiara and Priyonggo document a more general pattern of print media struggling to find viable online business models due to limited reader willingness to pay, weak human resource capacity, and the dominance of free aggregators (Mutiara & Priyonggo, 2019). Astuti and Irwansyah frame this as a "news desert" problem, in which alternative digital outlets fill gaps left by collapsing legacy media, often without sufficient economic foundations to sustain public-interest reporting (Astuti & Irwansyah, 2022).

Clickbait, SEO, and algorithmic capture

A substantial literature documents the rise of clickbait and SEO-driven editorial strategies as direct responses to platform algorithmic curation. Jung and colleagues show that clickbait functions as a digital nudge exploiting cognitive biases, particularly diminished attention spans and reduced interest in hard news (Jung et al., 2022). Diez-Gracia and colleagues confirm that even "serious" international outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *El País*, and *Público* have incorporated clickbait into their front pages, particularly around the most-read and most-shared articles, eroding informational quality and audience trust (Diez-Gracia et al., 2024). Lischka and Garz show empirically that clickbait supply and user interaction form an inverted-U-shaped relationship and that news outlets collectively adjust toward industry clickbait standards following platform algorithm changes (Lischka & Garz, 2021). Herbowo and Sanityastuti document an Indonesian counter-discourse on @clickunbait, suggesting that the societal consequences of platform-driven clickbait have begun to provoke civic pushback (Herbowo & Sanityastuti, 2023).

SEO is the most direct manifestation of platform dependency in editorial decision-making. Akmalia, Herawati, and Aunillah document that the Indonesian outlet Detik.com systematically integrates SEO considerations into editorial workflow, using SEO as a strategy for audience reach, competitor analysis, and channel-specific differentiation (Akmalia et al., 2024). Trielli and Diakopoulos show that top positions in Google's Top Stories box confer disproportionate referral traffic, concentrating attention among already-dominant outlets (Trielli & Diakopoulos, 2019). Calzada and Gil provide empirical evidence that Google News functions as a gatekeeper of news visibility, although some large publishers resist its dominance (Calzada & Gil, 2019). Athey, Möbius, and Pál find that Google News substantially increases referral traffic, particularly for breaking news, making news outlets structurally dependent on the aggregator (Athey et al., 2021). Bandy and Diakopoulos extend this line to Apple News, demonstrating that audited audit studies reveal uneven editorial logic between platform curation systems (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020). Daucé and Loveluck show how these dynamics play out in non-Western contexts, including Russia through Yandex.News (Daucé & Loveluck, 2021).

Publisher bargaining regulation and the comparative regulatory landscape

Australia's News Media Bargaining Code has become the most studied regulatory innovation in this domain. Flew, Iosifidis, Meese, and others describe how the NMBC, enacted in 2021, used concepts from competition law to address the bargaining power imbalance between news outlets and platforms, securing around AU\$200 million in annual transfers from Google and Meta (Flew et al., 2023). Carson and Müller examine its effects on digital-native journalism in Australia, finding that while some support has flowed to public-interest outlets, the code has been more successful for legacy media than for digital-native start-ups (Carson & Müller, 2023). Molitorisz and Attard show that the NMBC has transferred approximately AU\$250 million annually but warn that Meta's 2024 decision not to renew deals worth an estimated AU\$70 million has already triggered widespread job cuts across major Australian newsrooms, exposing the structural fragility of bargained settlements (Molitorisz & Attard, 2024). Columbia Journal analysis underscores that even with the code's arbitration mechanism, designation has not been triggered and that core mechanisms have been watered down following platform lobbying (Arts, 2023). Ors identifies the NMBC and the parallel EU copyright directive as the two principal regulatory models under development globally (Ors, 2021).

In Indonesia, attempts to replicate this framework are advancing. Sandrini and Somogyi map the diffusion of

news media bargaining codes from Australia to Canada and Indonesia (Sandrini & Somogyi, 2023). Syafruddin, Syahriah, and André describe the Indonesian Press Council's leadership in drafting a publisher rights regulation, noting that digital platforms account for approximately 60% of Indonesian media advertising spending (Syafruddin et al., 2023). Nugroho and Juwita analyse Presidential Regulation 32/2024, highlighting its distribution priority mechanisms, Rp105 trillion revenue-sharing obligations, and the oversight committee embedded within the Press Council (Articles 9–17) (Nugroho & Juwita, 2025, 2026).

Rohmana, Budhijanto, and Rafianti argue that Indonesian legislation remains suboptimal in protecting local media against platform asymmetries, requiring specific legal frameworks that prioritise fairness and publisher rights (Rohmana et al., 2023). Aprilla and colleagues, together with Lauta and colleagues, also document regulatory gaps in the digital sphere, particularly the absence of explicit KPI authority over digital platforms under the 2002 Broadcasting Law (Aprilla & L.L.M., 2025; LAUTA et al., 2025). Saogi identifies a 52% rise in 2024 in criminalisation cases tied to digital political expression, suggesting that without harmonised platform regulation, the press freedom environment deteriorates (Saogi, 2025). Prahassacitta traces Indonesia's existing policy framework on information disorder, including criminal penalties under Articles 14–15 of the 1946 Criminal Law and Articles 263–264 of the 2023 Penal Code, alongside regulatory provisions in the ITE Law (Prahassacitta, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This article mobilises three theoretical resources to make sense of Indonesia's platformised news environment.

Srnicek's platform capitalism provides the macro-political-economic frame. Platforms are best understood not as neutral infrastructure but as capitalist enterprises that combine network effects, cross-subsidisation, and data extraction to consolidate market and discursive power (Mandal, 2018; Sadowski, 2020; Sousa, 2019; Srnicek, 2017). The platform business model is premised on capturing and monetising attention, behavioural data, and engagement signals. News organisations, in this view, function as contingent content providers whose editorial decisions are reshaped, sometimes imperceptibly, by the operational requirements of platform distribution (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

Smythe's audience commodity theory, as revived and extended by Fuchs, Caraway, Fisher, and others, provides the labour-theoretical lens. Mass media sell audiences to advertisers; in the digital age, audiences are sold as data commodities to algorithmic advertising systems (Caraway, 2011; Fisher, 2012; Fuchs, 2012). Users produce behavioural surplus value by spending time on corporate platforms; journalists produce editorial surplus value by adapting their craft to platform logics. The result is a multi-layered labour process in which journalistic labour, audience labour, and platform algorithmic labour are bound together in a single valorisation circuit (Beverungen et al., 2015; Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013; Gandini, 2020; Turow & Couldry, 2018).

Napoli's digital audience economics offers the meso-level institutional framework. Napoli's work traces how audience measurement has evolved from broadcast ratings to multi-platform, multi-currency digital metrics, including time spent, engagement, and proprietary platform data (Jackson-Brown, 2011; Medina et al., 2024; Sullivan, 2005). The proliferation of "audience currencies" — size, engagement, exposure diversity — has intensified competition among them and reduced the professional autonomy of news organisations, whose commercial sustainability increasingly depends on metrics they do not control (Napoli, 2011; Nelson & Webster, 2016). Audiences are increasingly datafied, fragmented, and dependent on opaque algorithmic valuations, complicating the relationship between journalistic quality and economic viability.

The article's specific contribution is to synthesise these three frameworks into a single conceptual model — the *algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox* — that captures the contradiction between algorithmic visibility (which promises short-term commercial sustainability) and structural dependency (which undermines the long-term conditions for public-interest journalism).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a *qualitative secondary-data design* integrating critical thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. Secondary-data research designs are appropriate when the research question concerns

expansive structural relationships that exceed the scope of single-site ethnography or interview studies, and when triangulating across scholarly, industry, and regulatory sources can sharpen analytical leverage. Consistent with Carvalho's programme for analysing journalistic texts through CDA, the approach treats news discourse and industry discourse as mutually constitutive sites of meaning production that both reflect and reproduce commercial and ideological structures (Carvalho, 2008; Fürsich, 2008).

The corpus includes (a) peer-reviewed Indonesian and international journal articles identified through Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar searches using terms such as "platform capitalism", "platformization", "audience commodity", "digital audience economics", "clickbait", "SEO", "Indonesia online journalism", "Indonesian news business model", "publisher rights", "Press Law", and "investigative journalism Indonesia"; (b) industry and analytics reports, including the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, DataReportal reports, We Are Social/Meltwater analytics, and the Indonesian Press Council's press freedom documentation; (c) regulatory documents, including the 1999 Press Law, the 2002 Broadcasting Law, the ITE Law, Presidential Regulation 32/2024 on publisher rights, the ACCC and ACMA documentation on the Australian News Media Bargaining Code, and the Canadian Online News Act; and (d) Indonesian primary newsroom materials, including public-facing SEO headlines, social-media formatting, and editorial-style statements by outlets such as Detik.com, Kompas.com, Tempo.co, CNN Indonesia, and Tribunnews.

Critical thematic analysis follows the iterative coding logic articulated by Braun and Clarke, focused on identifying recurrent themes across scholarly, regulatory, and industry material. The categories developed — algorithmic dependency, commodified visibility, editorial adaptation, regulatory asymmetry, sustainability paradox — emerged inductively but were progressively refined through engagement with the theoretical framework. Each theme is coded against the full corpus, and counter-evidence is actively sought to test the boundaries of each category (Hastuti et al., 2025; Jung et al., 2022; Lischka & Garz, 2021).

CDA is applied principally to the discursive dimension of platform logic. Following Reynolds, the analysis attends to the language, framing, and ideological positioning through which platform and news-industry actors construct the problems of news sustainability, the responsibilities of news organisations, and the obligations of platforms (Reynolds, 2018). CDA is also used to examine how Indonesian regulation frames the publisher–platform relationship relative to comparators such as Australia and Canada (1951- & 1974-, 2017; Connor et al., 2024).

The methodological design has acknowledged limitations. Secondary-data research cannot directly observe editorial decision-making in newsrooms; it relies on the available scholarly literature, which is uneven in its treatment of Indonesian online media. The article therefore supplements Indonesian-specific findings with the broader comparative literature on platformisation, while making explicit when an argument is grounded in Indonesian primary material (e.g., Akmalia et al. on Detikcom (Akmalia et al., 2024), Oktavianti on small-medium Indonesian newsrooms (Oktavianti, 2026)) and when it draws from comparative cases (e.g., Lischka and Garz on German legacy outlets (Lischka & Garz, 2021), Bandy and Diakopoulos on Apple News (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020)).

FINDINGS

SEO-driven news production and the commodification of the headline

The most pervasive editorial adaptation documented across the Indonesian online news landscape is the integration of SEO into the earliest stages of editorial decision-making. Akmalia, Herawati, and Aunillah's study of Detik.com — Indonesia's most visited online news outlet — demonstrates that SEO is now intrinsically tied to editorial routine. Journalists craft not only story content but also title, teaser, brief description, and hashtag with explicit attention to search ranking (Akmalia et al., 2024). The reasons are explicitly commercial: SEO is treated as a tool for broader audience reach and as a competitive weapon against rival outlets whose search rankings function as share-of-voice metrics. Editors interviewed in the study note that channel-specific SEO cultures produce different standards across properties, reinforcing the position that algorithmic visibility has become a primary determinant of editorial value.

Oktavianti documents a parallel pattern in Indonesian small- and medium-sized newsrooms, where SEO knowledge is integrated into the hiring and evaluation of journalists and where editorial performance is increasingly measured through metrics that clients — typically advertising partners — use to allocate marketing spend (Oktavianti, 2026). As one informant candidly states, "To earn revenue, we must follow Google's journalism standards. Viral news, even though its lack of accuracy, can increase traffic, and that is what clients care about. High traffic, high page views, satisfied clients — that is how we survive. Idealism no longer matters." This statement captures the structural substitution that has occurred: Google's optimisation calculus has effectively replaced editorial judgement as the dominant rule of news selection.

Cumulatively, these findings align with Trielli and Diakopoulos' empirical observations on the disproportionate referral traffic that top positions in Google's Top Stories box confer (Trielli & Diakopoulos, 2019) and with Athey, Möbius, and Pál's finding that Google News is the principal referral path for breaking news (Athey et al., 2021). In Indonesia, these dynamics are intensified by the volume of digital-native outlets and the absence of the legacy oligopoly that still anchors much Global North consumption. The result is a market in which SEO performance — not editorial distinctiveness — determines whether an outlet remains visible.

Clickbait headlines and the structural degradation of newsworthiness

Closely associated with SEO is the rise of clickbait editorial strategies. Across the corpus, Indonesian online media increasingly deploy clickbait headlines as a low-cost, high-yield engagement tactic. Harahap and Adeni's review of Indonesian online media ethics identifies clickbait as one of three principal categories of ethical violation, alongside weak verification and the spread of misinformation, with both economic pressures and social media algorithms identified as drivers (Indonesia et al., 2025). Suryaputri and Rizki extend this to TikTok, documenting that Indonesian news organisations, including CNBC Indonesia, Urbanasia.com, and TribunJabar.id, routinely translate straight news reportage into short-form video with attention-grabbing formatting optimised for the platform's logic of forgability rather than informational completeness (Suryaputri & Rizki, 2022). Nurazizah frames this as the *commodification of news into short videos*, in which editorial creativity is reconfigured as algorithmic compliance (Nurazizah, 2024).

These findings resonate with the global literature. Jung and colleagues show that clickbait exploits cognitive biases and shortened attention spans, producing higher engagement but lower informational density (Jung et al., 2022). Diez-Gracia and colleagues confirm that *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *El País*, and *Público* — flagship outlets in their respective national press ecologies — have all incorporated clickbait on their digital front pages (Diez-Gracia et al., 2024). Lischka and Garz document that the German legacy press collectively adjusts toward an industry clickbait standard following algorithm changes, with Facebook's deprioritisation interventions producing only limited dispersion effects (Lischka & Garz, 2021). In Indonesia, where platform dependence is structurally higher, the pull toward clickbait is correspondingly more pronounced: the few legacy outlets that maintain traditional journalistic standards compete against a vast field of digital-native outlets willing — and financially pressured — to adopt whatever headline strategies maximise clicks.

Rahman's review demonstrates that this trajectory raises acute ethical dilemmas, as the prioritisation of revenue erodes accuracy, objectivity, transparency, and public interest as guiding norms (Rahman, 2023). Herbowo and Sanityastuti's study of @clickunbait suggests that Indonesian audiences have begun to recognise and contest these dynamics, but civic literacy initiatives cannot substitute for the structural reform required to alter the underlying commercial incentives (Herbowo & Sanityastuti, 2023).

Multi-platform optimisation and the absorption of editorial labour

Multi-platform optimisation refers to the practice of tailoring content to the specific algorithmic, demographic, and cultural logics of each major platform — typically including a website, YouTube channel, Facebook page, Instagram feed, and increasingly a TikTok account. Oktavianti, Paramita, and Sukendro's study of Indonesian mobile journalists producing news videos for YouTube channels documents that organisational regulation, situational factors, and technological adaptability all determine news video productivity, with looser internal rules generically producing more viral but lower-quality news while stricter rules produce more selective but lower-volume output (Oktavianti et al., 2024). Woda and colleagues describe Detik.com's pivot from independent online

news outlet to conglomerate-owned hybrid news-and-services multimedia platform, illustrating how organisational ownership shapes platform strategy (Woda et al., 2021).

Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, and López-García, drawing on a content analysis of 234 news media and programmes on TikTok from around the world, document that news outlets have progressively incorporated TikTok since 2019 to reach younger audiences, with platform-specific adaptations in formatting, narrative, and style (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020). Demetrio and colleagues describe how EKORA NTT applies this logic in Indonesian newsrooms, producing short-form videos with CapCut templates and uploading during peak engagement windows (Demetrio et al., 2024). Syahdafi and Efendi's study of @cnnindonesia on TikTok shows that even major Indonesian legacy outlets now organise editorial work around the rhythms of a short-form video platform algorithm (Syahdafi & Efendi, 2025).

The labour implication is significant. Miconi, Cannizzaro, and Risi observe that multi-platform optimisation redistributes editorial labour across more discrete tasks, increasing output volume while fragmenting the time and attention available for sustained investigative or explanatory activity (Miconi et al., 2024). For Indonesian journalists, the compounding effect of SEO, clickbait, and multi-platform adaptation produces an editorial environment in which the time budget for any single story is dramatically compressed.

Analytics-governed newsrooms and the erosion of editorial autonomy

The fourth finding concerns the role of audience analytics in editorial decision-making. Hastuti and colleagues' systematic review documents that algorithmic ranking drives narrowed editorial scope, performance-driven story selection, prioritisation of certain news types, and micro-audience segmentation that bypasses long-form journalism (Hastuti et al., 2025). In the Indonesian setting, Oktavianti shows that "every month, our IT team releases page view reports because we no longer recognise traditional journalism", suggesting that analytics infrastructures have effectively become editorial gatekeepers (Oktavianti, 2026).

This dynamic aligns with Seipp's argument that algorithmic curation redistributes power across the news-production network by introducing what Diakopoulos and Trielli describe as a "machine editor" — a non-human actor that shapes the perceived selection criteria of news (Trielli, 2025; Trielli & Diakopoulos, 2019). Bell and Owen-adjacent concerns in Nelson and Webster are particularly salient: in the age of big data, "audience currencies" are detached from any single metric, and German legacy outlets' collective adjustment toward a clickbait "industry standard" demonstrates that analytics infrastructures have become monopolies of measurement that constrain what counts as news (Lischka & Garz, 2021; Nelson & Webster, 2016). The Indonesian digital press, lacking both the scale and the institutional protection enjoyed by German legacy outlets, faces amplified exposure to analytics pressure: as one Indonesian newsroom principal argued, "Fix the business first, and the content will follow" (Oktavianti, 2026).

Commodification of labour and the marginalisation of investigative journalism

A fifth strand of findings concerns the structural impact of platformisation on public-interest and investigative journalism. Suherman documents that algorithmic monetisation, audience-driven visibility, and platform dependency in Indonesia marginalise journalism whose forms — long-form, slow, labour-intensive investigative reporting — cannot be made algorithmically legible (Suherman, 2025). Kurnia and colleagues' mapping of post-New Order investigative outlets shows that even before platformisation, Indonesian investigative journalism operated on thin financial resources and fragile institutional protection; platformisation has compounded these vulnerabilities (Kurnia et al., 2020, 2021). Fahadi documents the persistent structural obstacles, including defamation law weaponisation, threats of physical assault, and government-driven media capture, that compound the economic fragility of investigative reporting (Fahadi, 2019).

Globally, the trend is similar. Márquez-Ramírez, Amado, and Waisbord document labour precarity among Latin American journalists as deeply entrenched, with platforms intensifying the casualisation of news work (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2021). Salamon, Belair-Gagnon, and Crawford show that, under neoliberal platform capitalism, independent creators and freelance journalists face intensified self-exploitation through individualised branding and visibility pressures (Salamon et al., 2026). In all of these contexts, the news industry's *audience commodity* status compounds the labour exploitation already experienced by journalists, who, even as they are squeezed

economically, are expected to produce ever-higher quantities of optimised content for an attention economy whose primary beneficiaries remain platform owners (Caraway, 2011; Fuchs, 2012; Gandini, 2020).

Theoretical Contribution: The Algorithmic Dependency–Sustainability Paradox

The findings converge on a structural tension that warrants theoretical elaboration. Indonesian online media adopt algorithm-responsive editorial strategies to secure the algorithmic visibility that, in turn, generates the advertising revenue necessary for institutional sustainability. However, the very adaptations that secure visibility — SEO-driven production, clickbait headlines, multi-platform optimisation, analytics-governed decision-making — entrench the dependence of newsrooms on platforms, commodify journalistic labour, marginalise investigative and public-interest reporting, and reproduce the structural conditions that have made the news business model crisis symptomatic in the first place. In other words: the algorithmic adaptations that promise short-term financial survival accelerate the structural erosion of long-term sustainability.

This tension can be theorised as the *algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox*. The paradox has six interrelated dimensions:

1. *Visibility without viability*. Algorithmic visibility generates short-term reach but does not necessarily produce revenue sufficient to sustain newsroom operations, particularly when platform algorithms change rapidly and unpredictably (Athey et al., 2021; Trielli & Diakopoulos, 2019).
2. *Engagement versus newsworthiness*. The metrics prioritised by algorithms (clicks, watch time, shares) systematically diverge from professional news selection criteria (significance, public interest, diversity), producing editorial decisions that are optimised for the former and corrosive of the latter (Diez-Gracia et al., 2024; Jung et al., 2022; Lischka & Garz, 2021).
3. *Multi-platform reach versus institutional coherence*. Adapting content to each platform's logic fragments the editorial identity of newsrooms and complicates the cultivation of brand-loyal direct audiences (Demetrio et al., 2024; Nurazizah, 2024; Oktavianti et al., 2024; Syahdafi & Efendi, 2025; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020).
4. *Audience commodification versus audience relation*. Smythe-derived analysis shows that the audience is sold, in platformised media, as a data commodity rather than cultivated as a public (Beverungen et al., 2015; Caraway, 2011; Fuchs, 2012; Livingstone, 2018; Turow & Couldry, 2018). The resulting relations are extractive rather than dialogic.
5. *Algorithmic opacity versus accountability journalism*. Investigative reporting, which depends on time-intensive, non-routine, and often adversarial investigation, is structurally incompatible with the output cadence and engagement optimisation that platform analytics demand (Kurnia et al., 2020, 2021; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2021; Suherman, 2025).
6. *Local democratic accountability versus global platform capture*. Indonesian journalism serves a democratic polity that warrants locally relevant public-interest reporting, yet the structural composition of the audience economy is determined by global platforms whose incentives are agnostic to local democratic consequences (Fahmy & Elhamy, 2025; Hasan, 2026; Steinberg et al., 2024).

The algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox extends the political-economy tradition of audience commodity analysis (Caraway, 2011; Fisher, 2012; Fuchs, 2012) and the platformisation literature (Dijck et al., 2018; Miconi et al., 2024; Nieborg & Poell, 2018) by focusing on the *sustainability* of public-interest journalism rather than on the *extraction* of value per se. It also extends Suherman's nested-crisis framing of Indonesian investigative journalism (Suherman, 2025) by generalising the analysis to the full spectrum of algorithm-responsive editorial strategy, not just long-form investigation. Finally, the paradox is situated explicitly within the regulatory comparative literature: as Flew and colleagues show, even Australia's NMBC has not eliminated structural dependency, and Meta's 2024 decision not to renew deals worth an estimated AU\$70 million has already triggered widespread job cuts (Arts, 2023; Carson & Müller, 2023; Flew et al., 2023; Molitorisz & Attard, 2024). This indicates that bargaining-code approaches can mitigate but not dissolve the paradox.

Implications for Policy, Regulation, and Democratic Communication

The findings carry implications across three intersecting domains: media policy, platform regulation, and democratic communication.

Media policy

Indonesia's regulatory environment remains structurally inadequate to the scale of platformisation. The 1999 Press Law establishes press freedom and the Press Council's quasi-regulatory function but does not address platform dependency (Maharani, 2024; Suriyanto, 2020). The 2002 Broadcasting Law, drafted before the rise of digital platforms, does not confer explicit oversight authority on KPI over digital content, creating a regulatory vacuum that April and Lauta's analyses document (Aprilla & L.L.M, 2025; LAUTA et al., 2025). Saogi finds a 52% increase in 2024 in criminalisation of digital expression linked to political speech, signalling that the ITE Law is increasingly used as a tool of arbitrary suppression (Maulani & Soponyono, 2025; Saogi, 2025). Prahassacitta's analysis of information-disorder regulation shows that Indonesia's penal approach under Articles 14–15 of the 1946 Criminal Law and Articles 263–264 of the 2023 Penal Code prioritises criminalisation over intermediary liability and platform accountability (Prahassacitta, 2023).

A coherent media policy for platformised news would require (a) extending the Press Council's mandate to include oversight of how Indonesian news outlets interact with global platforms; (b) adopting a co-regulatory model, as Saogi suggests (Saogi, 2025), that integrates state, industry, and civil society; (c) investing in media literacy programmes that equip audiences to recognise platform-driven distortions; and (d) reaffirming the protective function of the Press Law against ITE Law overreach.

Platform regulation

The comparative regulatory landscape offers instructive models. Australia's NMBC has transferred approximately AU\$200–250 million annually from Meta and Google to Australian news outlets, but its effects on long-term sustainability are limited (Carson & Müller, 2023; Flew et al., 2023; Molitorisz & Attard, 2024). Canada's Online News Act was explicitly modelled on the Australian code (Sandrini & Somogyi, 2023). Indonesia's Presidential Regulation 32/2024 represents the country's first attempt to operationalise publisher rights, with article 5 establishing distribution priority, article 7 mandating Rp105 trillion in revenue sharing, and articles 9–17 embedding an oversight committee within the Press Council (Nugroho & Juwita, 2025, 2026). However, Nugroho and Juwita caution that Presidential Regulation 32/2024 functions as a *lex specialis* that supplements but does not replace copyright law, leaving residual ambiguity about its durability (Nugroho & Juwita, 2025). Rohmana, Budhijanto, and Rafianti argue that without broader reform to Indonesian copyright law, publisher rights will remain subject to structural asymmetries (Rohmana et al., 2023).

Drawing on the comparative experience, an effective Indonesian platform regulation would incorporate (a) eligibility criteria that prioritise public-interest and investigative outlets, not only legacy media; (b) mandatory transparency of platform payments to news outlets; (c) data-sharing arrangements that allow Indonesian researchers and regulators to audit platform algorithmic effects on news visibility; (d) a binding dispute-resolution mechanism that does not depend on voluntary bargaining; and (e) protections akin to those Flew and colleagues propose for cross-jurisdictional regulatory cooperation (Flew et al., 2023).

Democratic communication

At the broadest level, the algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox threatens the informational foundations of democratic communication. Indonesian democracy has experienced significant stagnation and backsliding, with civil society increasingly polarised and protective of democratic norms unevenly (Arifin et al., 2022; Asrinaldi & Yusoff, 2023; Jh. & Jh., 2020; Mietzner, 2011, 2020). The erosion of investigative journalism — documented across the Indonesian literature (Fahadi, 2019; Kurnia et al., 2020, 2021; Suherman, 2025) — weakens the watchdog function that journalism performs in democratic accountability. The proliferation of clickbait, weak verification, and misinformation documented by Harahap and Adeni (Indonesia et al., 2025) degrades the informational environment on which democratic deliberation depends. As Fahmy and Elhamy argue for the Global South more broadly, Western framings of press freedom and the watchdog role rarely translate directly into contexts of media capture, oligarchic ownership, and platform asymmetry (Fahmy & Elhamy, 2025).

The findings of this study suggest that democratic communication in Indonesia and comparable emerging democracies requires not only platform regulation but also sustained investment in alternative institutional infrastructures: collaborative investigative networks, public-interest journalism funds, university-affiliated

newsrooms, and not-for-profit digital initiatives such as those documented by Astuti and Irwansyah in their work on Indonesian alternative media filling "news deserts" (Astuti & Irwansyah, 2022). Suherman's two-track framework — external solutions through platform regulation and media literacies, plus internal solutions through collaborative infrastructure and institutionalised newsroom partnerships — provides a useful organising principle (Suherman, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how Indonesian online media organisations adopt algorithm-responsive editorial strategies, how these strategies reshape journalistic quality and newsroom autonomy, and how platform capitalism restructures the economic conditions of media sustainability in an emerging democracy. Drawing on Srnicek's platform capitalism, Smythe's audience commodity theory, and Napoli's digital audience economics, the analysis demonstrates that SEO-driven production, clickbait headlines, multi-platform optimisation, and analytics-governed newsroom decision-making generate short-term commercial visibility while entrenching structural platform dependency, commodifying journalistic labour, and marginalising public-interest and investigative journalism.

The article's principal theoretical contribution is the *algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox*, which captures the structural tension between the algorithmic visibility that newsrooms need to remain viable and the structural dependency that the pursuit of visibility reproduces. The paradox intersects with — but is not exhausted by — the comparative publisher-bargaining literature (Arts, 2023; Carson & Müller, 2023; Flew et al., 2023; Molitorisz & Attard, 2024; Nugroho & Juwita, 2025, 2026; Sandrini & Somogyi, 2023). As the Australian experience has shown, even ambitious bargaining-code reforms cannot, on their own, dissolve the paradox: Meta's non-renewal of AU\$70 million in deals has already triggered widespread job cuts. Indonesian publisher rights regulation under Presidential Regulation 32/2024 represents a promising institutional innovation, but its durability is unclear and its operation is constrained by copyright law's residual ambiguity.

Three conclusions follow. First, Indonesian policy makers should pursue a multi-track reform agenda combining platform-specific regulatory innovation, publication of platform-payment transparency, and a Press Council mandate over platform dependency. Second, newsroom-level responses — collaborative investigative networks, audience relationship models that bypass platform dependence, and editorial decision frameworks that protect investigative capacity — are necessary complements to regulation. Third, scholarship on platform capitalism and journalism should centre the Global South, where platform dependency is structurally higher and where the consequences of the algorithmic dependency–sustainability paradox are particularly acute for democratic communication.

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