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Algorithmic gatekeeping in transition: Generative AI and accountability in Indonesian newsrooms

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Abstract The integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into digital journalism has prompted concerns over editorial accountability, yet existing research predominantly applies normative ethical frameworks to Western contexts, leaving a critical gap in understanding how political-economic conditions in Global South democracies shape algorithmic gatekeeping. To address this gap, this study employs a political economy of communication framework and a qualitative multiple-case study of four Indonesian digital newsrooms legacy conglomerate, digital-native, independent investigative outlet, and public broadcaster analysing how GenAI restructures accountability mechanisms. Findings reveal three core mechanisms: an 'efficiency-accountability bargain' that forces resource-poor outlets into technological dependency on proprietary AI vendors; the emergence of a 'techno-editorial elite' that concentrates epistemic authority and generates 'algorithmic alienation' among traditional journalists; and the fragmentation of editorial chains, which reorients accountability from public-interest norms toward commercial platform metrics. These findings demonstrate that algorithmic gatekeeping in Indonesian newsrooms is structurally stratified by political-economic position, producing distinct accountability configurations that cannot be resolved through ethical guidelines alone.

Keywords: algorithmic gatekeeping; digital newsrooms; Generative AI; journalistic accountability; political economy

INTRODUCTION

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into journalism represents more than a simple technological upgrade; it constitutes a profound paradigm shift in the political economy of news production. This transition is fundamentally reshaping the gatekeeping function, the core editorial process of selecting, filtering, and framing information for public consumption (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). As algorithmic systems assume greater responsibility for content creation and curation, editorial authority is increasingly redistributed from human journalists to opaque algorithms and the commercial entities that control these platforms (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; van Dalen, 2024). This evolving configuration presents a severe challenge to journalistic accountability, making it exceedingly difficult to pinpoint responsibility within complex, automated media systems.

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Previous scholarship on AI in journalism has primarily focused on the normative ethical challenges of these technologies, such as algorithmic bias, transparency deficits, and the spread of misinformation (Banafi, 2024; Flores et al., 2023; Porlezza & Amigo, 2025). While these studies are invaluable in identifying the ethical risks of automated systems, they often treat AI as a neutral technological challenge resolvable through better guidelines. This creates a significant literature gap, as existing research seldom considers the structural and material factors driving AI adoption. Much of the current literature overlooks how material conditions, such as ownership patterns, revenue dependencies, and access to technology, actively reconfigure the architecture of accountability (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Pickard, 2020).

To address this gap, this study utilises the Political Economy of Communication (PEC) framework established by Mosco (2009). The PEC perspective posits that technological systems like GenAI are not neutral instruments; rather, they are constitutive of political arrangements of power, commercial pressures, and infrastructural dependencies. Viewed through this theoretical lens, the adoption of AI is driven by capitalist imperatives to maximise efficiency and profit. Consequently, this study conceptualises accountability not as a static set of principles, but as a dynamic construct continuously reshaped by technological adoption within specific market and political constraints (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022).

This theoretical gap is particularly pronounced in contexts outside North American and European media spheres, making the Indonesian digital news landscape a critical and revealing case study. As a major Global South democracy with a post-authoritarian history, Indonesia possesses a vibrant, highly competitive, and heavily platform-dependent media ecosystem (Masduki, 2017; Tapsell, 2017). The adoption of GenAI in Indonesian newsrooms occurs at a unique intersection: intense local commercial pressures, the rapid concentration of algorithmic authority in global tech firms (Winseck, 2020), and a journalistic culture striving to balance democratic ideals with market survival (Pintak & Setiyono, 2010). Consequently, examining Indonesian media offers specific insights into how resource constraints and platform dependencies uniquely threaten media pluralism and accountability in ways not fully captured by Western-centric studies (Hamdy & Elias, 2025; Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2023).

In light of these specific contexts, the primary aim of this research is to conduct a political-economic analysis of algorithmic gatekeeping in transition. Its core objective is to analyse how the integration of generative AI reconfigures structures of power, economic imperatives, and institutional agency within Indonesian digital newsrooms. By doing so, the intended contribution of this study is threefold: theoretically advancing the PEC framework to algorithmic gatekeeping, empirically filling the geographical gap in the Global South, and practically providing a critical diagnosis to inform resilient policy frameworks for safeguarding journalistic integrity.

To achieve these aims, this study is guided by the following central research question: How does the integration of GenAI, analysed through a political economy of communication framework, restructure algorithmic gatekeeping and the mechanisms of journalistic accountability? By answering this question, the research seeks to move beyond descriptive ethical debates to provide a structural diagnosis of how accountability is negotiated, sustained, or eroded within the algorithmic age.

METHODOLOGY

The framework of this study aligns with critical realism and the political economy of communication approach. For critical realism, social reality is structured by objective, causal mechanisms that lie beyond perception, encompassing power, materiality, and social relations (Bhaskar, 1975; Fletcher, 2017). This view is essential for the study of algorithmic gatekeeping, enabling an understanding of generative AI as a social technology embedded within particular configurations of social relations (Kitchin, 2017). Consequently, the study focuses on identifying generative mechanisms such as commercialisation, platform dependency, and institutional logics that shape the overt practices of accountability (Meyer, 2021).

The research uses a qualitative multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018) to address 'how' accountability is reorganised in different newsroom settings. To encompass the diversity present within the political media economy of Indonesia, four specific digital newsrooms were selected as the definitive cases for this study: (1) Kompas Cyber Media, representing a large legacy-based media conglomerate; (2) Kumparan, representing a large digital-native news outlet; (3) Project Multatuli, representing a mid-sized independent investigative outlet; and (4) TVRI Digital,

representing a public service-oriented digital broadcaster. This purposeful sampling captures theoretical saturation across critical variables of ownership, resources, and editorial missions (Flick, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Data were triangulated from three sources (Denzin, 1978). The primary source comprised 36 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with principal stakeholders across the four cases (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The participants were strategically selected to represent different levels of editorial and technical control. A detailed breakdown of the informants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of informants

No.	Informant code	Initials	Position / role	Media affiliation	Age	Gender	Year of interview
1	I-1	AS	Editor-in-Chief	Kompas Cyber Media	52	Male	2024
2	I-2	BP	Technology Director	Kompas Cyber Media	48	Male	2024
3	I-3	CD	Desk Editor	Kompas Cyber Media	39	Female	2024
4	I-4	DE	AI Product Manager	Kumparan	34	Male	2024
5	I-5	EF	Senior Editor	Kumparan	44	Female	2024
6	I-6	FG	Managing Editor	Project Multatuli	41	Male	2024
7	I-7	GH	Senior Journalist	Project Multatuli	37	Female	2024
8	I-8	HI	Digital Director	TVRI Digital	50	Male	2024
9	I-9	IJ	Content Editor	TVRI Digital	35	Female	2024
10	I-10	JK	Senior Journalist	Kompas Cyber Media	42	Male	2024
11	I-11	KL	Data Journalist	Kompas Cyber Media	29	Female	2024
12	I-12	LM	Software Engineer	Kompas Cyber Media	31	Male	2024
13	I-13	MN	Managing Editor	Kompas Cyber Media	45	Female	2024
14	I-14	NO	Social Media Editor	Kompas Cyber Media	28	Female	2024
15	I-15	OP	Data Scientist	Kompas Cyber Media	33	Male	2024
16	I-16	PQ	Editor-in-Chief	Kumparan	47	Male	2024
17	I-17	QR	Technology Director	Kumparan	43	Male	2024
18	I-18	RS	Desk Editor	Kumparan	38	Female	2024
19	I-19	ST	Data Scientist	Kumparan	32	Male	2024
20	I-20	TU	Senior Journalist	Kumparan	40	Female	2024
21	I-21	UV	Social Media Editor	Kumparan	27	Female	2024
22	I-22	VW	Software Engineer	Kumparan	30	Male	2024
23	I-23	WX	Editor-in-Chief	Project Multatuli	49	Male	2024
24	I-24	XY	Data Journalist	Project Multatuli	31	Female	2024
25	I-25	YZ	Desk Editor	Project Multatuli	36	Male	2024
26	I-26	ZA	Investigative Journalist	Project Multatuli	44	Female	2024
27	I-27	AB	IT Support Specialist	Project Multatuli	29	Male	2024
28	I-28	BC	Audience Engagement Editor	Project Multatuli	33	Female	2024
29	I-29	CD	Content Editor	Project Multatuli	37	Male	2024
30	I-30	DE	Managing Editor	TVRI Digital	46	Female	2024
31	I-31	EF	Desk Editor	TVRI Digital	41	Male	2024
32	I-32	FG	Senior Journalist	TVRI Digital	39	Female	2024
33	I-33	GH	IT Manager	TVRI Digital	45	Male	2024
34	I-34	HI	Data Journalist	TVRI Digital	30	Female	2024
35	I-35	IJ	Social Media Editor	TVRI Digital	28	Female	2024
36	I-36	JK	Reporter	TVRI Digital	26	Male	2024

Source: Primary data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between January and June 2024. Year of data collection: 2024

Table 1 presents the complete profile of 36 informants who participated in this study. Initials are pseudonymised to protect confidentiality. Age ranges from 26 to 52 years, with a balanced gender distribution (19 male, 17 female) reflecting the composition of Indonesian digital newsrooms. All interviews were conducted in 2024.

Second, organisational documents were analysed, including AI ethics guidelines, transparency reports, and technology procurement documents (Bowen, 2009). Finally, non-participant-focused observations were conducted during editorial meetings and technology demonstrations to understand the practical negotiation of AI tools in daily work routines (Emerson et al., 2011).

The analytic process employed an abductive reasoning approach, utilising NVivo software for systematic coding (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). To ensure methodological transparency, the process of translating raw data into the final typology followed three distinct analytical

phases. First, *open coding* was conducted on the interview transcripts to identify surface-level practices of AI adoption. The main coding categories at this stage included 'AI for content generation', 'algorithmic headline testing', and 'budget constraints for AI APIs'.

Second, *axial coding* (thematic analysis) was used to group the initial codes into broader analytical themes within the political economy framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase generated higher-order categories such as 'commercial dependency', 'asymmetric algorithmic literacy', and 'editorial chain fragmentation'. Finally, a cross-case analysis using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was conducted across the four media outlets (Miles et al., 2014). By comparing how these analytical categories manifested differently across newsrooms' ownership types and resource levels, the research inferred the underlying causal mechanisms (Danermark et al., 2019). This systematic comparative pathway directly translates into the typology presented in the results section, categorising accountability configurations into distinct types based on their political-economic realities. The study adhered to strict ethical protocols, including informed consent and confidentiality, and practised reflexivity through a research journal (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Indonesian digital newsrooms reveals a complex transition in gatekeeping, in which each organisation's political-economic position deeply shapes the integration of Generative AI (GenAI). Drawing from in-depth interviews and organisational observations, the findings demonstrate that journalistic accountability is systematically reconfigured along three distinct structural axes: commercial dependence, asymmetric algorithmic literacy, and the fragmentation of the editorial chain.

Commercial dependence with efficiency– accountability bargain

A clear divergence emerged between resource-rich and resource-constrained newsrooms in their procurement policies and daily AI practices. For legacy conglomerates and large digital-native majors (e.g., Kompas Cyber Media, Kumparan), GenAI adoption is a strategic investment aimed at market leadership. These organisations possess the internal capacity to build proprietary layers atop foundational models. A Technology Director at a major digital-native outlet articulated this explicitly: *"We are not just users; we are building proprietary layers on top of foundational models to own our 'editorial algorithm'"*. This results in a centralised governance model overseen by internal AI Ethics Boards. However, a senior editor admitted, *"I trust the system because the board approved it, but I do not always know why it suggests this angle over another."*

Independent and public service outlets (e.g., Project Multatuli, TVRI Digital) operate under pragmatic dependence. Lacking internal budgets to build proprietary systems, they rely almost exclusively on public, off-the-shelf AI APIs. An editor at an independent outlet explicitly articulated this trade-off: *"We use ChatGPT Plus because it is the industry standard; their safety features are our first line of defence. We do not have the budget to audit the algorithms ourselves"*. This reveals a stark 'efficiency-accountability bargain' in actual newsroom practice: smaller outlets gain critical productivity to survive but consciously forfeit substantive control over the verification and ethical oversight of the very infrastructure they use.

Asymmetric algorithmic literacy and infrastructural accountability

The integration of GenAI has instituted a new knowledge-based power hierarchy, reframing AI adoption from mere tool use to a redistribution of epistemic authority. In all observed newsrooms, a small cohort of actors, typically younger data journalists or newly appointed 'AI Product Managers', has emerged as a 'techno-editorial elite'. They gained influence not through traditional editorial seniority, but through their mastery of prompt engineering. A senior journalist at a legacy outlet observed their disproportionate power: *"The output of the AI is only as good as the prompt. The few who master this craft now have an unseen hand in shaping stories from the very start"*.

This elite effectively displaces traditional editorial deliberation because critical framing decisions are embedded in technical parameters before a traditional editor even sees the draft. Meanwhile, most of the rank-and-file journalists experience 'algorithmic alienation'. A reporter at a public broadcaster described this shift: *"They tell us to use it as a 'starting point,' but if I don't*

understand the starting point, how can I be accountable for the finish?". This alienation forces most journalists into superficial compliance, blindly trusting the output generated by the techno-elite's prompts.

Fragmentation of the editorial chain and dissolved responsibility

GenAI's insertion into idea generation, drafting, and optimisation has fragmented the linear editorial chain. This fragmentation creates a pervasive 'attribution problem' in daily practice. For example, during an observation at a digital-native outlet, an AI-generated summary of a financial report contained a subtle error. The journalist argued the initial prompt was correct, the approving editor trusted the journalist's verification, and the tech team blamed the foundational model's training data. Ultimately, responsibility was diffused and logged as a 'system error', illustrating how accountability ambiguity manifests in practice.

Furthermore, this fragmented chain is frequently tethered to engagement-driven editorial logics. In commercially driven outlets, AI is embedded directly into visibility management. A social media editor described this exact practice: *"The AI suggests ten headlines. We pick the top three by predicted click-through rate. It is not about what is most important, but what will perform"*. This demonstrates how accountability is actively reoriented away from public-interest journalism toward platform performance indicators.

The metric imperative: reorienting accountability to platform logic

In commercially driven news organisations, the integration of GenAI tools is often oriented toward maximising engagement-based performance indicators, such as click-through rates, time on page, and algorithmic visibility across digital platforms. Within these environments, AI systems are commonly deployed to optimise editorial elements, including headline generation, content summaries, and story framing, based on predictive models of audience behaviour. When automated systems determine which headline or framing is most likely to attract clicks, platform-driven metrics become embedded directly into foundational editorial decisions (Christin, 2020). As a result, the operational logic of digital platforms is effectively integrated into the core of editorial gatekeeping, reshaping how newsworthiness and priority are determined within newsroom workflows.

This development gradually reorients the normative purpose of gatekeeping. Traditionally, gatekeeping has been understood as a professional process through which journalists evaluate the relevance, significance, and public value of information before publication. However, in AI-assisted editorial environments optimised for engagement metrics, the criteria guiding these decisions increasingly reflect algorithmic visibility and audience responsiveness rather than established journalistic norms such as public relevance, democratic deliberation, or investigative significance. Consequently, the editorial process becomes partially subordinated to platform optimisation logics, where the performance of content within algorithmically mediated distribution systems becomes a central determinant of editorial choice. The changing nature of journalism has also reflected a growing distance from journalistic accountability. A central characteristic of journalism's social legitimacy has been its contribution to democracy by informing citizens, fostering public discourse, and holding parties in power (political and institutional) accountable (Winseck, 2020). By contrast, the logic of accountability enabled by the AI-aided editorial process is fundamentally market-driven. In this environment, a newsroom can be seen as highly accountable to the quantitative metrics generated by analytics dashboards. At the same time, it is no longer accountable to the public regarding informing them, especially on matters that are complex and long-term or structurally significant, and in the context of limited audience interest and engagement.

News is further commodified in the digital media environment as a consequence of this phenomenon. The growing focus of journalistic production as a public good that enhances civic understanding is of secondary importance to the production of a good that garners and sustains consumer attention (Tandoc Jr & Foo, 2023). In engagement-centred algorithmic editorial processes, stories that are emotionally charged or sensational in nature and therefore require little audience time are more likely to be promoted in the system. In contrast, stories that require significant audience time to explain and are therefore less engaging are less likely to be promoted.

This structural change cannot be solely achieved through the addition of newsroom-level ethical principles and the introduction of new AI technologies. More extensive political and economic restructuring is required to rebalance the power among journalism, technology, and commerce. Practical approaches could include regulations on platforms that control the editorial process, policies to protect independent journalism, and new funding mechanisms to avoid pressure from revenue-based funding models. Without these structural changes, the persistent growth of AI-based optimisation in commercial journalism will perpetuate the status quo, in which editorial AI serves the economic interests of the platforms rather than the purposes of democratic communication.

Table 2. A typology of algorithmic accountability reconfiguration in Indonesian newsrooms

Newsroom political-economic type	Primary AI logic	Accountability configuration	Empirical evidence from Indonesian cases	Source (informant Code / observation)	Year
Corporate / resource-rich	Sovereign investment	Centralised technocratic governance	e.g., Kompas & Kumparan building proprietary APIs on top of base models; creating internal AI Ethics Boards for centralised oversight.	I-1, I-2, I-4, I-16, I-17; Observation at editorial tech meeting (Kompas, March 2024)	2024
Independent / resource-poor	Pragmatic dependence	Externalised & outsourced	e.g., Project Multatuli & TVRI relying on public ChatGPT Plus, citing lack of budget to audit algorithms.	I-6, I-8, I-23, I-30, I-33; Document analysis: procurement records (Project Multatuli, April 2024)	2024
All (stratified internally)	Skill-based integration	Concentrated in a 'techno-elite'	e.g., Younger desk editors acting as "AI translators," bypassing traditional editorial meetings by setting algorithmic parameters.	I-11, I-15, I-19, I-24, I-34; Observation at Kumparan daily editorial meeting (May 2024)	2024
All (process level)	Chain fragmentation	Diffused and dissolved	e.g., Unclear attribution during errors (financial report summary errors blamed on "system glitches" rather than editors).	I-5, I-12, I-18, I-25, I-31; Incident log review (Kompas, June 2024)	2024
Commercial-driven	Metric optimisation	Shift to platform performance	e.g., A/B testing 10 AI headlines and selecting solely based on predicted click-through rate, overriding journalistic framing.	I-14, I-21, I-28, I-35; Observation at TVRI Digital analytics dashboard session (May 2024)	2024

Notes:

1. All sources refer to primary data collected between January and June 2024.
2. Informant codes (I-1 to I-36) correspond to the profile in Table 1.
3. Observations were conducted as non-participant focused observations during editorial meetings and technology demonstrations

Source: Author Analysis, 2026

The empirical findings from Indonesian digital newsrooms confirm that algorithmic gatekeeping is not a uniform technological evolution, but a profound structural reconfiguration deeply stratified by political-economic positions. The results demonstrate that the accountability challenges of AI are not isolated ethical dilemmas; rather, they are symptoms of deeper systemic transformations in the power and material foundations of journalism within a highly commercialised media ecosystem. By synthesising the theoretical framework of the political economy of communication with the empirical realities of Indonesian media, this discussion elucidates how accountability is systematically relocated and reconfigured.

The political economy of platform subordination in the Global South

The stark divergence between resource-rich conglomerates that build proprietary governance and resource-poor independent outlets that outsource it provides a crucial extension to the political economy of communication framework (Mosco, 2009; Pickard, 2020). While prior scholarship primarily warned of the 'platformisation' of news distribution (Nieborg & Poell, 2018;

van Dalen, 2024), the observed 'efficiency-accountability bargain' demonstrates that platform dependency now penetrates the very productive core of content creation.

In the context of Indonesia, a Global South democracy characterised by concentrated media oligarchy and intense digital competition (Masduki, 2017; Tapsell, 2017), this bargain forces independent outlets to trade their editorial sovereignty for mere survival. The accountability vacuum observed in smaller outlets represents profound structural disempowerment. Because they lack the material and technical capacity to audit or challenge the proprietary AI APIs they use (McCradden et al., 2020), their editorial pluralism collapses under economic pressure. This creates a dangerous trajectory for Indonesian journalism: a de facto monoculture of algorithmic governance dictated by external AI vendors (Porlezza & Amigo, 2025). Ultimately, this dynamic locks Global South media into a new form of technological subordination, in which local media institutions are increasingly accountable to the design logics of Silicon Valley monopolies rather than to their local civic constituents (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2023). Furthermore, this subordination is not merely infrastructural but epistemic. Because the foundational AI models powering these APIs are trained predominantly on Western, Global North datasets, they inherently carry foreign epistemologies and cultural blind spots. When Indonesian newsrooms rely on these proprietary systems to generate, summarise, or frame local stories, they risk inadvertently reproducing Western-centric biases and erasing nuanced postcolonial realities. This structural inequality manifests as a subtle form of cultural imperialism, where the algorithmic lens through which Indonesian civic issues are prioritised and narrated is fundamentally designed by, and optimised for, Global North contexts.

Infrastructural accountability and the redistribution of epistemic authority

The emergence of the 'techno-editorial elite' and the subsequent 'algorithmic alienation' of traditional journalists conceptually reframes AI adoption as a radical redistribution of epistemic authority. The data reveal that accountability is no longer just a normative professional principle taught in newsrooms, but an infrastructural practice shaped by internal stratification (Ferrer-Conill et al., 2021; Foà et al., 2024). In Indonesian newsrooms, a generational and skill-based fault line has appeared: younger data-literate journalists or AI managers now wield immense, unchecked editorial power simply by controlling prompt parameters, bypassing traditional editorial deliberations.

This internal hierarchy mirrors the broader concept of 'data colonialism' (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), where control over technological infrastructure equates to control over narrative power. In a postcolonial media landscape, this dynamic means that the 'techno-editorial elite' not only wields internal newsroom power but also serves as an unwitting conduit for foreign algorithmic logics translating local Global South realities into technical parameters that fit the rigid architectures of Global North AI models. For the alienated majority of journalists, this manifests as a profound loss of professional agency and procedural disengagement (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). They are forced to trust AI outputs they cannot critically interrogate blindly. Consequently, a coherent, newsroom-wide accountability framework breaks down. This reality necessitates a theoretical shift toward 'networked accountability', in which responsibility must be traced and mapped across both human skills and technical parameters, rather than relying on outdated hierarchical models of traditional newsrooms (Ananny & Crawford, 2018).

Dissolved responsibility and the 'black box' of production

The documented fragmentation of the editorial chain provides vital empirical grounding for the 'black box' problem in algorithmic journalism (Alduais, 2025; Diakopoulos, 2019). The findings reveal that opacity is not solely a technical characteristic of machine learning models; it is deeply organisational and socially constructed. Algorithmic gatekeeping systematically decentres the traditional locus of editorial control (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

As evidenced by attribution problems in AI-assisted production, the intense commercial drive for efficiency inherently incentivises the disintegration of oversight-rich editorial processes. These are quickly replaced with parallel automated tasks that diffuse individual responsibility across a hybrid network of actors (Lewis et al., 2019). When an error occurs, accountability dissolves into a vague 'system glitch', incentivising the passing of the ethical buck. Restoring accountability in this fragmented landscape requires developing new socio-technical

mechanisms, such as mandatory algorithmic audit trails, to ensure that editorial decisions remain traceable to both human and machine agents.

The metric imperative: reorienting accountability to platform logic

Most critically, the integration of AI for headline A/B testing and algorithmic visibility illustrates how platform logic is hardwired directly into foundational editorial choices (Christin, 2020). This represents a fundamental perversion of journalistic accountability. Historically, Indonesian journalism has struggled to balance its democratic mission with market survival (Pintak & Setiyono, 2010). However, the metric-driven AI optimisation shifts this balance entirely toward the market.

Instead of serving democratic functions and upholding public-interest journalism (Winseck, 2020), accountability is entirely reoriented toward engagement-driven metrics. It creates a paradoxical scenario where a digital newsroom is highly 'accountable' to real-time analytics dashboards that rapidly adapt to click-through rates and algorithmic trends, but increasingly unaccountable for informing its public about complex, systemic issues that do not generate immediate engagement. This fundamentally accelerates the commodification of news in Southeast Asian digital ecosystems (Tandoc Jr & Foo, 2023). Countering this perversion requires profound political-economic realignments, including structural policies and alternative public-interest funding models, to insulate editorial AI from pure commercial optimisation and protect the democratic core of journalism.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transition toward algorithmic gatekeeping in Indonesian digital newsrooms is a profound structural reconfiguration rather than a mere technological upgrade. Grounded in the empirical realities of the Indonesian media ecosystem, the findings reveal that organisational political economies are systematically reshaping journalistic accountability. Specifically, the data illustrates a stark material divide: while resource-rich media conglomerates attempt to centralise technocratic control through proprietary systems, resource-poor independent and public outlets are forced into an 'efficiency-accountability bargain', effectively outsourcing their ethical governance to external AI vendors. Furthermore, the integration of generative AI has stratified newsrooms internally, empowering a 'techno-editorial elite' while alienating traditional journalists, and fragmented the editorial chain, prioritising platform metrics over public interest. Theoretically, these findings extend the political economy of communication framework by demonstrating that in a Global South context, platform dependency now penetrates the very core of news production, shifting accountability from normative journalistic principles to commercial platform logics.

While this study does not prescribe a singular normative solution, the empirical findings suggest several practical and policy implications. Organisationally, the observed 'algorithmic alienation' suggests that newsroom leaders should broaden journalist training beyond operational tool use to include foundational algorithmic literacy, thereby mitigating internal power asymmetries. To address the fragmented workflows that lead to a dissolved sense of responsibility, newsrooms may benefit from establishing cross-functional ethics boards and clear decision-mapping protocols for AI-assisted content. At the policy level, the structural disempowerment of smaller outlets implies a pressing need for systemic interventions. Policymakers and press councils might explore mechanisms to support media pluralism, such as facilitating access to shared, ethically governed AI infrastructures for independent publishers, ensuring that economic resources do not solely determine the capacity for journalistic accountability.

Finally, recognising the boundaries of this multiple-case study, the findings open a targeted agenda for future research. Because this study highlights the distinct structural pressures on Global South media, comparative research across similar post-authoritarian or platform-dependent democracies is needed to test the broader generalisability of these accountability configurations. Furthermore, the identification of a new 'techno-editorial elite' warrants deeper sociological investigation into how this emerging hierarchy shifts long-term labour dynamics, union strategies, and professional identities within the journalism industry. Lastly, future action research should build upon the conceptual need for 'networked

accountability' identified here by practically designing and testing socio-technical audit trails tailored to the fragmented realities of modern digital newsrooms..

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