

Homeless media versus local media: Contesting authority in the digital platform era

Amrullah Ali Moebin ^{*)}, Muchamad Rudi Cahyono²,
Nibrosu Rohid³, Muhammad Khoirul Malik⁴

¹Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah
46 Mayor Suyadi Street, Tulungagung, Indonesia

²Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Universitas Islam Tribakti
62 Wahid Hasyim Street, Bandar Lor, Mojoroto Kediri, Indonesia

³Department of Communication, Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe
61 Manunggal Street, Tuban, Indonesia

⁴ Faculty of History, Arts and Regional Studies, Leipzig University
Ritterstraße 26, 04109 Leipzig, Germany

Email: amrullahtuban@gmail.com, Phone: +62 335 321513

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Abstract This study critically examined the erosion of institutional authority in information production amid the rise of digital platforms, focusing on the contestation between local media and homeless media in East Java, Indonesia. Drawing on a qualitative multiple case study of BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo alongside Instagram-based homeless media accounts (@lingkarjonegoro and @seputarpasuruan), the research combines passive observational netnography with semi-structured interviews to trace shifts in communicative power. The findings suggest that homeless media function as algorithmically driven actors sustaining a parasitic-symbiotic relationship with platform infrastructures. Comment section analysis reveals how netizen discourse is shaped by affective and viral dynamics, marked by accusation, amplification, and identity signalling over rational deliberation, which renders institutional credibility increasingly subordinate to algorithmic visibility. Unaffiliated media consistently dominate the breaking news phase, whilst verified reporting from institutional actors arrives too late to influence public perception, exposing a structural disadvantage that compounds the broader crisis of media legitimacy. This crisis is felt most acutely amongst younger audiences, for whom authority is no longer anchored in journalistic standards but reconstituted through likes, shares, and follower counts, such that trust itself becomes effectively commodified. The study argues that digital platforms have recast media legitimacy as a form of algorithmic sovereignty, compelling local media to navigate the tension between editorial integrity and platform-driven survival. The result is an ecosystem defined not by coexistence but by unstable competition, in which authority and truth are perpetually renegotiated within the attention economy.

Keywords: digital platforms; homeless media; local media; media authorities

^{*)}Corresponding Author

INTRODUCTION

Human communication practices have undergone a profound transformation in the wake of rapid technological advancements (Wiriany et al., 2022). The emergence of information technology, such as social media and the internet, has fundamentally disrupted established communication structures whilst simultaneously eroding the institutional authority of traditional communication actors. This development has occurred principally because digital technology has fundamentally restructured the conventional constraints of geography, distance, temporality, and social stratification, enabling information to reach wider audiences across any context irrespective of time or location (Medha, 2025), thereby enabling communication to transpire across any context, irrespective of time or location. Crucially, this transformation ought not to be regarded merely as an evolutionary progression; rather, it signifies the onset of a systematic dissolution of communicative control, which had hitherto been monopolised by mainstream media institutions.

Within the field of mass communication, the media occupies a central and indispensable role, serving as the primary conduit through which messages are disseminated to the broader public (McQuail, 2010). In the process of mass communication, the media is a key element as it can disseminate messages to the public (Nurudin, 2007). Beyond this foundational function, the mass media also commands a dominant position in the construction and shaping of public perception, exercised through its respective editorial frameworks and gatekeeping mechanisms. In contemporary mass communication scholarship, media is broadly categorised into two distinct forms mass media and social media (McQuail, 2010). Within this framework, the mass media assumes particular significance, functioning not merely as a channel of transmission but as an active producer and architect of information whose roles are being progressively reconfigured by the imperatives of digital platforms (Hongcharu, 2024).

The process through which the mass media generates and curates information carries considerable societal implications. It possesses the capacity to mould public opinion and in doing so, to elevate particular issues to the status of social agenda (McQuail, 2010). In the present era, accelerating technological advancements are increasingly reshaping the processes of information production, thereby precipitating a wider and more profound transformation of the contemporary communications ecosystem.

The advent of digital technology continues to engender significant and far-reaching disruption within the mass media landscape (Besman & Evita, 2024). Media organisations that had previously demonstrated limited engagement with digital technology are now compelled to adapt and reconfigure their operational frameworks in response to its pervasive influence (Hongcharu, 2024). In today's media environment, mass media can no longer be seen as the sole channel through which information is distributed, as various other platforms have emerged that enable information to reach wider audiences (Medha, 2025). Social media, in particular, has progressively established itself as a significant and increasingly influential channel for information dissemination.

Equally significant is the transformation in the role of audiences within the digital communications ecosystem. Social media users are no longer positioned merely as passive recipients of mediated messages, but increasingly participate directly in the production, interpretation, and circulation of information (Swastiningsih et al., 2024). This development reflects a broader reconfiguration of audience positioning within contemporary communication systems. Consequently, the communications ecosystem can no longer be characterised as centralised. Instead, it has become increasingly fragmented, decentralised, and shaped by competitive interactions amongst a diverse range of information actors.

The emergence of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube has given rise to entirely new actors in the production and circulation of information (Hendrickx, 2023; Siciliano, 2023). Within this shifting paradigm, individuals and groups capable of producing more specialised content and functioning as independent news producers are referred to as *homeless media*, or media without a home (Horoub, 2023; Oktavianti, 2026). The term homeless is applied precisely because, unlike mainstream media organisations, these actors operate outside institutional structures and maintain no formal affiliation with established media companies (Amponsah & Atianashie, 2024). Homeless media are not merely media without institutional backing; they are actors that, in an ontological sense, lack a stable foundation from which to operate. They are 'squatters' within the digital platform ecosystem dominated by global

corporations such as Meta (Lucia et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025). The authority wielded by homeless media does not stem from formal journalistic legitimacy, but rather derives from algorithmic visibility (Garajamirli, 2025).

Homeless media are broadly characterised by the rapid dissemination of news content, the use of informal language, and a tendency towards anonymity amongst accounts administrators (Alexander & Junaidi, 2022). It is not uncommon for observers to conflate homeless media with citizen journalism; however, the two represent distinct concepts that ought not to be treated as interchangeable. Homeless media accounts tend to operate anonymously, whereas citizen journalism involves ordinary members of the public carrying on-the-spot reporting and performing recognisable journalistic functions (Irnando & Irwansyah, 2021). The relationship between the two is that homeless media relies on citizen journalism, as the content produced by citizen journalists is reposted by the administrators of homeless media accounts. Given the strong relationship between the two, they can be described as producers of information, even though they are not part of the mass media.

Before the rise of media social, the mass media stood as the public's principal source of information. Its role in conveying information has since undergone considerable transformation. Agenda-setting no longer operates through a single institutional channel but through a more complex, networked configuration in which a broader array of actors now compete to shape what audiences regard as significant (Almakaty, 2025). Following the reform era, the mass media sector become accessible to a far broader range of stakeholders, such that media outlets were no longer confined to capital cities such as Jakarta; numerous outlets subsequently emerged across regional areas throughout the country. This includes media organisations operating at the districts and municipal levels across Indonesia and it is these local outlets that play a particularly important role in keeping communities informed about regional affairs (Sen & Hill, 2010; Poti & Ahmad, 2021). Local media organisations carry out their professional journalistic work, thereby helping to act as a check on local government policy. However, as time goes on, the rise of digital technology has continued to drive transformation within the local media sector, with many website-based local media outlets emerging and social media being utilised to disseminate their journalistic content (Sakina & Hendrik, 2025).

In the context of this study, the practice of local media transformation may be observed in BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo, two local media outlets operating in East Java, specifically in Bojonegoro and Pasuruan Regencies. Both are regarded as belonging to the first generation of regionally based online media. BlokBojonegoro was established in 2011, whilst Wartabromo was launched in 2012. Both outlets initially operated as website-based media producing local news with a professional journalistic approach. As they developed, however, BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo progressively expanded their presence across various social media platform as additional channels for distributing information to reach a wider audience.

These challenges reflect broader structural patterns documented in the global literature in local digital journalism. Algorithmic bias, the proliferation of news deserts, and chronic funding instability have emerged as the defining threats to local media sustainability across diverse geographical contexts. Scholars have consistently demonstrated that technological innovation, viable business models, and civic engagement are not peripheral concerns but constitutive conditions of local media resilience (Jerónimo & Torre, 2025).

The use of social media serves not only as a promotional vehicle of news content but also constitutes part of each outlet's broader adaptation strategy in response to changing patterns of information consumption, as the public increasingly shifts towards digital spaces. In practice, both outlets produce news content that is not only disseminated via their websites but also repackaged in formats suited to the characteristics of digital platforms, including short form videos, infographics, and visual posts on social media.

This transformation demonstrates that local media are not only grappling with changes in communication technology, but also with the emergence of new actors in the production of information within the digital sphere, including the growing practice of homeless media via social media platforms. In this context, blokBojonegoro and Wartabromo do not merely function as providers of local information but are also engaged in the contestation of information production alongside various digital media actors operating in cyberspace. This situation gives rise to a conflict over media legitimacy in the dissemination of information. A contest for authority has emerged, as homeless media activists command a substantial audience.

In this study, the concept employed is the agenda-setting theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) to explain how the media, including local media and homeless media, seek to determine which issues the public considers important by highlighting certain topics in the digital sphere.

This theory is combined with Stig Hjarvard's (2013) concept of mediatization, which conceives of the media as an institution governed by its own logic, one that transforms and structures social practices and forces other institutions to adapt accordingly. Within this framework, the logic of digital platforms such as social media. However, in the contemporary digital environment, this logic has shifted toward what can be understood as platform logic, which is governed by algorithmic visibility, speed, visuality, and engagement metrics. Within this context, homeless media tend to gain prominence because they align with platform logic by producing fast, visual, and algorithm-friendly content. In contrast, local media often remain anchored in journalistic logic, such as verification and gatekeeping, which is frequently misaligned with the dynamics of digital platforms.

Furthermore, this study also employs Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) theoretical framework of fields and symbolic capital to analyse the competitive landscape between established media actors, such as professional local media, and new entrants, known as 'homeless media'. Local media such as BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo possess institutional capital, including press credentials, legal protection, and professional journalistic ethics. Homeless media rely on social and performative capital, reflected in follower counts, viral potential, and audience engagement in platform-based interactions, with their positions shaped by the shifting valuation of these forms of capital within the digital media field. The central conflict, therefore, lies in whether institutional credibility or algorithmic visibility is considered more valuable and legitimate in shaping public perception among audiences in East Java.

The contestation of authority over information production between local media and homeless media is clearly evident in everyday digital communication practices in Indonesia, where non-media actors are now capable of influencing public opinion through social media platforms (Puspitoningrum, 2025; Riyanto & Bhirawa, 2024). Instagram accounts such as @lingkarbojonegoro or @seputarpasuruan, operating as homeless media, deliver local news rapidly and virally, frequently drawing upon citizen journalism content including videos reposted by local residents, and in doing so compete directly with local media Instagram accounts such as blokBojonegoro or Wartabromo, which produce professional, website-based content adapted into short-form video formats. Local news YouTubers and viral accounts based on hyper-local information are becoming increasingly dominant, reflecting a shift in the structure of authority where speed and proximity to the audience are prioritised over institutional credibility, linking agenda-setting theory and Bourdieu's concept of the field to the realities on the ground.

Previous research on citizen media in Indonesia has highlighted its significant role in the dynamics of digital information; for instance, Puspitoningrum (2025) studied and analysed accounts such as @aslisemarang and @solokini as examples of citizen journalism that accelerate the distribution of local news through audience interaction. Similarly, Alexander & Junaidi (2022) found that community media such as Opini.id excel in interactive audiovisual content and high credibility within the field of creative digital journalism, whilst Puspitoningrum highlighted their ability to fill the information gap for marginalised communities, despite facing constraints regarding ethics and professionalism.

Other research, such as that by Apriliyanti (2024) on the case of Banjarmasin in South Kalimantan, highlights citizen journalism, which is regarded as homeless media. Consequently, professional journalists regard the data produced by this homeless media, in the form of photos and videos, merely as raw or preliminary data. Moebin (2026), in his research, examines the contestation of religious narratives on social media via algorithms, whilst Azzahra & Masitoh (2025) highlight Gen Z's preference for visual content on @folkative regarding non-mainstream issues.

Nevertheless, there is a significant research gap, as these studies have focused primarily on social participation, content creativity, and the individual impact of homeless media, without delving deeply into the contestation of authority over information production between anonymous homeless media and professional local media such as blokBojonegoro and Wartabromo in East Java. This gap is particularly significant given that digital local journalism scholarship has consistently identified community embeddedness, institutional commitment,

and temporal continuity as the three interconnecting elements that determine local media resilience in platform-dominated environments (Gulyas & Hess, 2024), yet the specific dynamics through which these elements are negotiated under conditions of direct competition with algorithm-native homeless media remain underexplored, particularly in the Southeast Asian context.

This gap becomes particularly important when considering the distinct local contexts of these regions: Bojonegoro as an oil-rich area and Pasuruan as an industrial and religious hub. These specific local identities raise further questions about whether homeless media strategically exploit localised narratives, cultural symbols, and everyday issues to produce more relatable and viral content, thereby bypassing the more standardized and institutionalised reporting practices of local media. In this sense, locality is not merely a backdrop but becomes a contested resource in the struggle for audience attention and media legitimacy.

There has been no comprehensive analysis of how digital platforms operate as contested arenas of power in which the hegemony of traditional media is increasingly eroded and journalistic authority is actively subverted by emerging actors. Rather than acting as a neutral channel, digital platforms reshape the conditions of visibility, legitimacy and influence, thereby enabling the emergence of new forms of domination that challenge the historically established authority of professional media.

This research fills this gap by adopting a framework of agenda-setting, mediatisation, and Bourdieu's field theory to address the following research questions: (1) How has the structure of authority in information production been reconstituted amid the erosion of media hegemony in the platform era? (2) How does the contestation between homeless media and local media manifest as a struggle over symbolic power, legitimacy, and audience capture? (3) How do digital platforms facilitate the subversion and redefinition of media legitimacy through algorithmic visibility and engagement?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative-dominant multi-method approach within a multiple case study design to examine the contestation of authority in information production between institutional local media and non-institutional homeless media in the digital platform era. Drawing on the framework of Robert K. Yin (2014) Robert, this design enables an in-depth analysis of contemporary media practices within real-life contexts. The selected cases include two institutional local media outlets, BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo, alongside two Instagram-based homeless media accounts, @lingkarjonegoro and @seputarpasuruan. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, as elaborated by Lincoln et al., (2011) in their discussion of paradigmatic controversies and confluences in qualitative inquiry, this study views authority in information production as a socially constructed and contested process shaped by competing logics, namely journalistic logic and platform logic. The qualitative-dominant multi-method approach integrates multiple qualitative techniques while incorporating limited quantitative elements. For example, grouping comments as an aid, rather than as the primary analytical strategy.

Data collection was conducted through two main techniques: in-depth interviews and netnography. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with editors-in-chief of BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo using criterion sampling, a specific form of purposive sampling (Patton, 2014), given their strategic roles in editorial decision-making and their capacity to explain newsroom practices, verification processes, and adaptation strategies in the digital environment. In addition, this study applies passive observational netnography following Kozinets (2010), wherein the researcher conducts observation-only engagement with online communities without active participation, in order to preserve the naturalistic quality of online behaviour. Netnographic observation was conducted over a six-month period (July-December 2024), focusing on content production, distribution, and audience interaction, particularly within comment sections as key sites of discursive contestation. A total of 601 comments from Instagram and YouTube were collected manually from publicly accessible content and analysed using MAXQDA (Faza & Moebin, 2023). The comments were categorised into positive, negative, and neutral sentiments; however, this categorisation is not intended for statistical generalisation, but rather as a heuristic tool to identify patterns of audience response and support qualitative interpretation.

This epistemological position is grounded in the interpretivist tradition, wherein analytical sufficiency is determined not by sample size but by the depth and richness of qualitative insight generated (Lincoln et al., 1985). Within netnographic inquiry, Kozinets (2010) explicitly argues that the value of online observation lies in its capacity to illuminate culturally embedded patterns of meaning rather than to achieve statistical representativeness. The 601 comments analysed in this study were not selected to approximate a population parameter; rather, they were examined as discursive traces through which recurring patterns of affective mobilisation, identity signalling, and credibility contestation became theoretically legible. Consistent with the principle of theoretical saturation (Strauss & And, 2017), data collection continued until no new thematic categories emerged from the comment corpus, at which point the dataset was considered analytically sufficient for the interpretative claims advanced in this study. This position is consistent with established practice in leading international communication journals, wherein qualitative corpora of comparable or smaller scale have been accepted as analytically sufficient when grounded in robust theoretical frameworks and systematic interpretative procedures, as demonstrated, for instance, in studies published in journals such as *New Media & Society* and *Media, Culture & Society*, where depth of discursive analysis is privileged over dataset size (A. N. Markham, 2013; boyd & Crawford, 2012)

Table 1. Informant profiles

No	Aspect	Asad Asnawi	Parto Sasmito
1	Full nName	Asad Asnawi (Mochammad Asad / M. Asad)	Parto Sasmito
2	Base loLocation	Pasuruan / East Java	Bojonegoro / East Java
3	Current pPosition	Editor-in-Chief of WartaBromo; Investigative Editor at Mongabay	Editor-in-Chief & Person in Charge, blokBojonegoro.com
4	Media sScale	Local and International (global newsroom)	Local (regional)
5	Specialisation	Investigative journalism, environment, politics, economy	General journalism, newsroom management, journalism education
6	Work sScope	National & international	Local & limited national
7	Education	Bachelor's Degree	IKIP Bojonegoro
8	Certification	Senior Journalist (Press Council)	Senior Journalist (Press Council)
9	Awards	5 international awards (EJN, GITOC, PCIJ, etc.)	-
10	Fellowships	AIJC South Africa, EJN, environmental investigation, taxation, etc.	-
11	Organisational Involvement	-	PWI Bojonegoro (HR Coordinator 2022-2025)
12	Journalistic Orientation	Investigative, data-driven, structural issues	Practical, educational, structured (straight news & feature)
13	Media Approach	Independence & in-depth investigation	Balance between business and editorial ideals ("warship vs merchant ship")
14	Educational Role	Not prominently mentioned	Active as journalism trainer
15	Audience Focus	Broad public (national-global)	Local & regional communities

Source: Author, (2025)

Data analysis follows the interactive model of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña (2014), which involves data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification through thematic coding. The analysis focuses on identifying forms of authority, logics of information production (e.g., speed versus verification), audience engagement patterns, and discursive constructions of credibility, supported by cross-case comparison between institutional and homeless media. Consistent with the interpretivist paradigm adopted in this study, the researcher acknowledges their role as a reflexive analytical subject whose positionality, interpretative lens, and engagement with the data constitute an integral part of the meaning-making process, rather than a source of bias to be distanced from (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Ethical considerations were addressed by anonymising user data, using only publicly accessible content, and avoiding any intervention in online communities (A. Markham & Buchanan, 2012). While the study is limited to specific cases in East Java and relies on publicly visible interactions, these limitations are mitigated through methodological triangulation and in-depth qualitative analysis, ensuring a robust and contextually grounded understanding of media contestation in the digital platform era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changes to the structure of the information production authority

The digital platform era has led to a systematic erosion of institutional authority over information production, which was previously dominated by established institutional media such as *blokBojonegoro* and *Wartabromo*. In the conventional model, authority over information production was established through formal mechanisms, such as press council licences, the application of codes of journalistic ethics, and editorial hierarchies that acted as gatekeepers to ensure the accuracy and credibility of information (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This structure is hierarchical, with the processes of selection, verification and distribution of information being overseen by a professional editorial team. As a result, the accuracy of the information produced is guaranteed and it is accountable.

The emergence of homeless media, defined in this research as media actors without a formal editorial structure and not affiliated with any institution, has shifted the conventional model towards a more decentralised pattern. Accounts such as *@seputar_pasuruan* and *@lingkarjonegoro* are not merely users of digital platforms, they are algorithm natives, actors whose entire operational logic is co-constituted by and optimised for platform reward systems. Their relationship with platforms such as Instagram and YouTube is simultaneously parasitic and symbiotic: parasitic in that they extract visibility, reach, and monetisation revenue from infrastructures they did not build and do not maintain; symbiotic in that their high-frequency, emotionally charged content feeds the engagement metrics that sustain platform advertising ecosystems. This parasitic-symbiotic dynamic grants homeless media a structural advantage that professional journalism, constrained by verification ethics and editorial hierarchies, cannot replicate without compromising its core function. In this context, the visibility of content is no longer determined by the validity of the source, but rather by the level of user interaction or engagement rate, such as likes, shares, and comments. This situation marks a shift from authority based on professional verification towards legitimacy based on communal validation.

This transformation in the structure of information production authority indicates that the structure now involves two main actors: institutional media and homeless media. Both operate according to different logics. Institutional media rely on symbolic capital in the form of credibility, reputation and adherence to journalistic standards, whilst homeless media accumulate social capital through intense algorithmic interactions and the ability to respond rapidly to events. Within Bourdieu's (1993) field theory, the local digital media arena can be understood as a space of contestation in which the two actors vie for legitimacy in the production of information through the distribution of different forms of capital.

The role of platform algorithms has been a key factor in this transformation. The concepts of the filter bubble (Pariser, 2011) and the echo chamber reinforce the distribution of personalised and emotionally charged information, thereby reducing the role of traditionally held by gatekeepers, although more recent scholarship has nuanced these deterministic assumptions by demonstrating that algorithmic enclosure operates primarily through the reinforcement of pre-existing epistemic dispositions rather than through total informational isolation, with systematic evidence confirming that such mechanisms structurally amplify ideological homogeneity whilst constraining viewpoint diversity across major platforms (Figà Talamanca & Arfini, 2022; Ahmmad et al., 2025). Algorithms tend to prioritise content that elicits strong emotional responses, including material that is controversial or sensational in nature. As a consequence anonymous or semi-anonymous actors without a fixed institutional base are able to attain a wide reach. Within this context, authority over information production shifts from a hierarchical model towards a more horizontal configuration.

This is consistent with Castells' (2009;1996) conception of the network society. Communication power in a network society tends to be distributed through dynamic network relationships, rather than through rigid vertical channels. In a participatory media environment, the boundary between producers and consumers of information is becoming increasingly blurred, as users of social media are no longer passive recipients of mediated messages but have evolved into active participants who simultaneously produce and circulate information across digital platforms, a transformation that fundamentally reconfigures the power dynamics of content creation and distribution within the digital media field (Swastiningsih et al., 2024).

Previous research, such as that conducted by Puspitoningrum (2025), confirms this phenomenon through the *@aslisemarang* study, in which citizen journalism or homeless media

increases the distribution of local information more rapidly than professional media, but often at the expense of verification ethics. In East Java, blokBojonegoro, which has 81,400 YouTube subscribers, competes with @lingkarjonegoro, which has 119,000 followers. The accumulation of these followers contributes to the redistribution of public attention, which in turn weakens the dominance of institutional media in setting the information agenda. Content that is reposted without a complete timeline still gains high visibility because it aligns with the logic of fast consumption, or so-called on-demand access.

From the perspective of mediatisation (Couldry & Hepp, 2013), digital platforms such as Meta and ByteDance function not merely as distribution channels, but as actors that determine the visibility of information. This indicates that power in the production of information has shifted from media institutions towards platform systems. This situation confirms that authority structures are no longer static and based on formal regulations but have become dynamic and dependent on algorithmic mechanisms and the attention economy. The results of six months of netnographic observation reveal a pattern of dual authority. Namely, homeless media dominate the initial breaking news phase, whilst institutional media play a role in the verification and in-depth analysis of information.

What initially appears as an asymmetrical dual authority configuration is, upon closer empirical examination, more accurately characterised as authority fragmentation: a condition in which no single actor holds stable, recognised dominance over the information production process. Homeless media dominate the first-contact phase through speed, but their authority is episodic and dependent on engagement, dissipating when subsequent viral events displace the current one. Institutional media retain depth and verification capacity, but their corrective role arrives too late to reshape the initial interpretative frame already set in the audience's mind. The result is not two authorities dividing the information space; it is a chaotic competition in which truth is systematically subordinated to engagement, and where the very concept of authoritative information becomes contested and unstable. This fragmentation confirms that the local digital media arena in East Java is not bifurcating into two organised camps; it is instead dissolving into a fluid attention economy governed by algorithmic logic rather than journalistic principle.

Whilst Habermas's normative conception of the public sphere positions deliberative rationality as the foundation of democratic discourse, the empirical material examined in this study suggests a rather different communicative logic. The 601 Instagram and YouTube comment analysed here are approached not as a statistically representative sample, but as a theoretically saturated corpus of discursive traces through which broader patterns of communicative practice may be interpreted. Scholars have increasingly challenged the applicability of Habermasian procedural democracy to algorithmically mediated environments, arguing that democratic practices cannot be simply encoded as procedures within platform architectures whose fundamental logic is engagement maximisation rather than communicative rationality (Viader Guerrero, 2024). The discursive patterns identified within this study's comment corpus lend empirical support to such critiques.

The material examined here is approached not as a statistically representative sample, but as a theoretically saturated corpus through which recurring discursive patterns were iteratively identified and interpreted. Rather than facilitating deliberation, the communicative environment more closely reflects what Dean (2020) describes as 'communicative capitalism', a condition in which the circulation of messages substitutes for, rather than enables, meaningful political exchange. This condition is not confined to Indonesia. Zanetti et al. (2023), for instance, identify a structurally comparable crisis in Brazil, wherein algorithmic logic contributes to a fragmented, less deliberative, and increasingly affective public sphere that weakens journalism's capacity to sustain democratic discourse. Such findings suggest that communicative capitalism operates not merely as a localised phenomenon, but as a broader transnational structural condition.

The comment sections observed function less as deliberative arenas and more as performative and tribal spaces, where identity expression, emotional amplification, and algorithmic incentives govern participation. This is more accurately theorised through the lens of Papacharissi's (2015) concept of 'affective publics', networked formations driven by shared emotional investments rather than reasoned argument. The pattern empirically documented across multiple platform contexts, including Hautea et al. (2021) multimodal analysis of climate activism on TikTok, wherein algorithmic affordances were found to amplify affect-laden participation at the expense of substantive deliberation, a dynamic structurally analogous to the

comment-section behaviour observed in this study. This affective dynamic is further evidenced within the Indonesian context, where Lim (2025) demonstrates that algorithmic politics systematically transforms emotional expression into a mechanism of political mobilisation, wherein visibility and affective resonance displace substantive engagement as the primary currency of public discourse.

At a deeper structural level, Ferreira (2025) conceptualises this process as aesthetic colonisation, wherein algorithmic mediation systematically converts the affective dimensions of communication into quantifiable engagement value, fundamentally restructuring the conditions under which democratic publics are formed and rendering affective mobilisation not an incidental feature but the constitutive logic of platform-mediated public discourse.

From a marginal perspective, independent media demonstrate a high degree of flexibility as they do not rely on physical infrastructure such as servers or domains. Conversely, institutional media are beginning to adapt by setting up dedicated social media teams and collaborating with influencers. This strategy indicates that the structure of authority in information production is no longer strictly hierarchical but is evolving into a hybrid model that combines professional practices with platform logic.

The theoretical implication of this shift is the deconstruction of traditional gatekeeping (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), replaced by platform gatekeeping where the authority over information production is determined by algorithmic metrics rather than editorial judgement. In Bojonegoro-Pasuruan, blokBojonegoro competes with off-track re-uploaders, whilst Warta Bromo collaborates for platform solidarity, demonstrating that the structure of authority is now networked rather than hierarchical. Overall, the erosion of institutional authority in the digital platform era reflects not merely a transition, but a structural dispossession, institutional media are not simply sharing power with algorithm-driven actors; they are losing the capacity to define what counts as credible information in the first place, where homeless media erode the authority of local media whilst forcing innovations such as dedicated social media teams and influencer collaborations. These findings fill a research gap in previous studies that failed to explore the dynamics of cyber power, confirming that digital platforms have redefined who has the authority to produce and validate public information.

The competition between homeless media and local media

The main contest between homeless media and local media in East Java is evident in the production of real-time information, where homeless media dominate breaking news, whilst institutional media require an editorial verification process that slows down publication. MAXQDA analysis shows that homeless media excel in first-mover advantage through rapid re-uploads without a complete timeline, whereas local media such as blokBojonegoro and Wartabromo prioritise in-depth reporting accompanied by YouTube embeds from their main websites. This contestation reflects platform gatekeeping (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), where Instagram's algorithms tend to prioritise speed over accuracy, a dynamic that contemporary scholarship has since reconceptualised as algorithmic gatekeeping wherein editorial authority is progressively displaced by engagement-driven visibility metrics that structurally disadvantage verification-oriented journalism (Van Dalen, 2023), a condition particularly acute for local media in Indonesia whose editorial independence is systematically eroded by platform monetisation logics that incentivise viral content over investigative depth (Suherman, 2025).

Homeless media outlets such as @lingkarjonegoro and @seputarpasuruan produce content by relying on reposting from netizens without formal journalistic filtering, unlike blokBojonegoro, which applies editorial gatekeeping before multi-platform distribution. An interview with Parto, editor-in-chief of blokBojonegoro, acknowledged that homeless media address a hyperlocal gap that is difficult for limited reporting teams to reach, yet simultaneously carry the risk of misinformation, such as off-track re-uploaders dominating the initial narrative. This finding aligns with a study by Riyanto & Bhirawa (2024), which found that homeless media in five major Indonesian cities are vulnerable to hoaxes due to their reliance on user-generated content (UGC) without systematic verification.

The structural pressure to adapt verification practices to platform logics is not confined to local media; Cazzamatta (2025) demonstrates that even major international news agencies have been compelled to establish dedicated fact-checking units whose selection criteria prioritise virality on Meta platforms over the verification of political claims, a finding that contextualises the

verification pressures experienced by BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo within a systemic global pattern of platform-driven editorial compromise.

Analysis of comments using MAXQDA reveals a contest over the credibility of information in cyberspace. The data collection period documented recurring discursive patterns that illustrate this dynamic concretely. In response to breaking news posted by @lingkarjonegoro, comments frequently exhibited accusatory framing. For example, this is fake and the government is hiding something. Viral amplification behaviour, for example, shares this before it gets taken down, and identity-signalling: we the people of Bojonegoro or Pasuruan know the truth. These patterns indicate that the comment section functions not as an arena for verification, seeking, but as a space for affective mobilisation, where the discursive power of the netizen lies not in their access to facts, but in their capacity to generate emotional contagion at scale. Institutional media comment sections, by contrast, attracted predominantly neutral or analytical responses, confirming the asymmetry between platform-native and journalistic communicative registers.

This explains why homeless media receive high levels of engagement, as evidenced by the sentiment of audience comments on each platform. Netizens' responses to information produced by institutional media such as Wartabromo tend to be neutral. This suggests that netizens are still processing the events being reported. This pattern of dominant neutral sentiment across 601 comments indicates a collective 'wait-and-see' disposition, a cognitive gap in which the audience has not yet fully committed to either the unverified narrative of homeless media or the verified account of institutional media. This verification-waiting posture observed among commenters on institutional media aligns with Chan's (2024) finding that audiences retain residual motivation to verify information when they perceive the stakes of misinformation as sufficiently consequential, a disposition that represents the critical remaining window of opportunity for local media's verified reporting to intervene decisively before audience cognition consolidates around the homeless media's initial unverified frame. Crucially, this gap represents the most strategically significant window remaining for local media: it is precisely in this undecided public space that depth-driven, verified reporting retains its power to decisively shape the final interpretative frame before audience cognition is locked. As shown in the Figure 1.

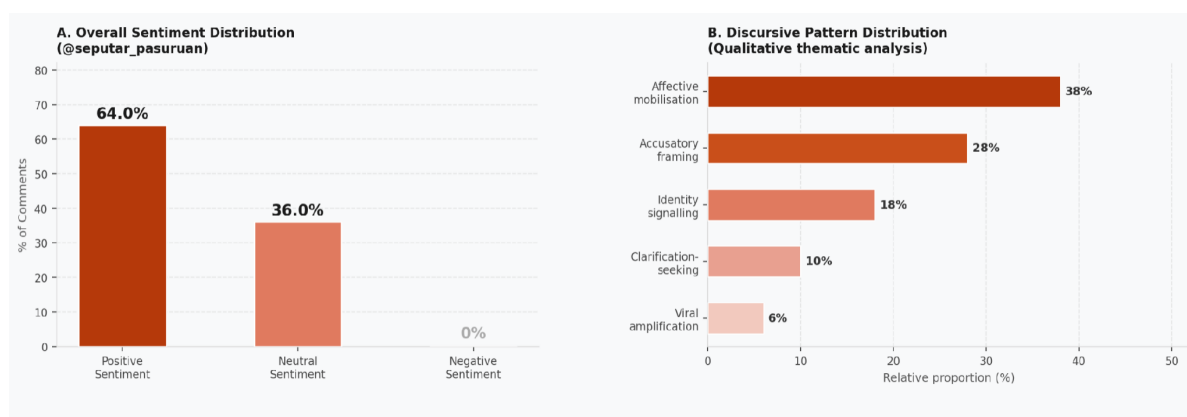


Figure 1. Comments compilation from Instagram and Youtube
 Source: Author (2026)

The data on figure 1 were compiled from 601 comments from both Instagram and YouTube. The data was analysed using three categories based on netizens' sentiment: positive, negative and neutral. Positive sentiment indicators include support, appreciation or positive emotions. Negative sentiment indicators include criticism, rejection or negative emotions.

Neutral sentiment, meanwhile, encompasses comments that do not register clear emotional valence, but this category requires discursive disaggregation. Analysis of the neutral comment corpus reveals two qualitatively distinct sub-patterns: first, a 'verification-waiting' posture, in which commenters withhold judgement pending confirmation, 'is this true?', 'waiting

for official statement'. Signalling residual trust in journalistic authority; and second, a 'social-tagging' behaviour, in which users mention others without engaging with the content's veracity. The former sub-pattern represents the critical remaining window in which institutional media's verified reporting can still decisively intervene before audience cognition consolidates around the homeless media's initial unverified frame.

Contestation in information production is influenced by the presentation of the information. Institutional media compete by forming separate social media teams for portrait-format videos, whilst homeless media excel in algorithm personalisation, creating a filter bubble.

In addition to the battle for information, the economic contest is evident in monetisation. Homeless Media converts views or shares into revenue via platform algorithms, namely Instagram monetisation, whilst blokBojonegoro relies on website advertorials combined with YouTube AdSense, with viewer numbers fluctuating between hundreds and millions on average. An interview with Asad (editor-in-chief of Wartabromo) revealed a strategy of collaboration with local influencers to reach a young audience, in contrast to blokBojonegoro's competitive approach, which strengthens the brand as a clearing house of information. This phenomenon is similar to Opini.id, which excels in interactive audiovisual content to achieve high credibility without a website infrastructure (Alexander & Junaidi, 2022).

Homeless media is vulnerable to quality disputes due to re-uploads without attribution, whilst local media adheres to the ITE (Electronic Information and Transactions) Law. The structural vulnerability of user-generated content to misinformation is well-documented in the broader literature. Aimeur et al. (2023), in a comprehensive systematic review, demonstrate that fake news detection remains an unresolved challenge precisely because misleading content is designed to closely resemble verified information, a condition that renders the rapid re-upload practices of homeless media particularly susceptible to inadvertent or deliberate disinformation amplification. The short-form video format of homeless media is misused for hoaxes as it is difficult to trace; a similar pattern has been detected in Pasuruan. MAXQDA thematic analysis further confirms that institutional media attract the lowest proportion of negative comments, a finding that, read alongside the dominant neutral sentiment, suggests that local media's credibility deficit is not yet irreversible. The audience has not rejected institutional media; it is waiting. This wait-and-see posture is the last structural gap local media can strategically exploit before algorithmic consolidation closes it. Audience contestation is fragmented as engagement insights show that homeless media wins in terms of reach, whilst local media excels in retention via trust metrics based on performance.

The most theoretically significant finding emerging from this study's cross-case analysis is the evolution of competition into coopetition. Rather than a zero-sum contest, the empirical evidence reveals that institutional and non-institutional media actors are developing negotiated interdependencies: Wartabromo strategically collaborates with local influencers to extend its reach among young audiences, whilst blokBojonegoro competes directly by consolidating its authority as a clearing house of verified information. Interview data confirms that both strategies are conscious responses to the same platform pressure, not divergent failures. Riyanto & Bhirawa (2024) recommend precisely this kind of collaboration as a mechanism for elevating homeless media credibility through journalistic mentoring. This coopetition model, simultaneously competitive and collaborative, operating across both journalistic logic and platform logic, constitutes this study's unique empirical contribution to the literature on media authority contestation in the digital platform era. It suggests that the future of local media legitimacy lies not in resistance to platform logic, but in the strategic and selective navigation of it: competing where institutional depth still commands audience trust, and collaborating where platform reach is the only currency that matters.

This contestation has resulted in a hybrid ecosystem in which homeless media dominate in terms of speed and local reach, whilst local media retain depth and trust. Wartabromo remains stable despite the competition. Data triangulation confirms that local media are adapting through collaboration or competition.

Digital platforms and media legitimacy

Digital platforms are fundamentally transforming media legitimacy by shifting the measure of authority from institutional credibility to algorithmic metrics, whereby independent media derive their legitimacy from their number of account followers. Meanwhile, institutional media derive

their legitimacy from press councils, and councils may also receive funding from Google and the government. Instagram's algorithm prioritises engagement rates over chronological accuracy, creating a performative legitimacy that gradually erodes the authority of local media such as blokBojonegoro, which is bound by the Press Council's code of ethics.

The Reuters Institute Digital Report (2025) confirms a 40% decline in digital media traffic due to a shift in information consumption towards AI and social media platforms. These changes in the structure and practices of information production have implications for the transformation of media legitimacy. Digital platforms have shifted the basis of legitimacy from institutional credibility to algorithm-based performance metrics. Consequently, legitimacy is no longer determined solely by adherence to journalistic standards, but also by the ability to generate high levels of engagement across digital platforms. This structural reconfiguration carries profound democratic implications; Max (2026) argues that algorithm-driven content curation, designed to maximise engagement rather than uphold democratic values, constitutes a systemic threat to the conditions under which speech can function as a democratic tool, particularly for institutional actors whose communicative authority is not recognised by platform reward systems.

Media legitimacy is now fragmented and contextual, shaped by the interaction between algorithms, user networks and content performance (Ananda et al., 2025; Hastuti et al., 2025). Accounts such as @seputar_pasuruan gain legitimacy through their number of followers and engagement rates, whilst local media outlets such as Wartabromo and BlokBojonegoro rely on institutional recognition and professional reputation. This shift indicates a transition from legitimacy based on traditional authority towards legitimacy that is more grounded in performativity and visibility within digital platforms, where identity and influence are built through user behaviour data and algorithmic metrics (Fisher & Mehozay, 2019). In the digital platform environment, algorithmic personalisation creates an echo chamber by amplifying content that aligns with the audience's preferences, thereby reinforcing the perception of truth even though the information has not been fact-checked (Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021). Algorithms tend to prioritise content that boosts emotional engagement and confirms existing biases, which contributes to polarisation and the fragmentation of information on social media. Consequently, the legitimacy that emerges is both perceptual and performative, meaning it is not based solely on objective verification or traditional institutional authority.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the comparative trajectories of BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo illuminate two divergent institutional responses to legitimacy fragmentation, and their differential outcomes carry direct implications for media sustainability in the platform era. BlokBojonegoro pursues a strategy of Institutional Purity: maintaining strict editorial gatekeeping, resisting influencer collaboration, and anchoring its legitimacy in press council recognition and investigative depth. Wartabromo, by contrast, adopts Platform Pragmatism: integrating influencer partnerships, adapting content formats to platform logic, and building legitimacy through networked visibility without entirely abandoning editorial standards.

In the context of the Reuters Institute Digital Report's (2025) confirmation of a 40% decline in digital media traffic, driven by audience migration towards AI-generated content and social media platforms, the sustainability calculus between these two strategies becomes empirically testable. The data collected suggests that Wartabromo's hybrid approach generates more consistent audience engagement across platforms, whilst BlokBojonegoro's institutional purity, though preserving credibility capital, produces diminishing reach as algorithmic distribution increasingly bypasses editorially-gated content. If sustainability is measured by the capacity to maintain audience relevance under conditions of algorithmic gatekeeping, the evidence points towards Platform Pragmatism as the more viable survival strategy in the short-to-medium term, not because journalistic standards are dispensable, but because legitimacy in the digital platform era is increasingly conferred by algorithmic systems that remain indifferent to such standards. The deeper implication is that Institutional Purity without platform adaptation is not simply a principled position, but an accelerating retreat.

The transformation of legitimacy has led to the emergence of hybrid forms of legitimacy. Local media outlets are beginning to integrate algorithmic logic into their distribution strategies without entirely abandoning editorial standards. Collaborations with influencers and the strengthening of a multi-platform presence have become strategies for maintaining relevance amidst the dominance of platforms. However, algorithm-based legitimacy also presents risks. Reliance on engagement metrics risks blurring the line between accurate information and

content that is merely popular. In the long term, this situation could erode public trust in the media ecosystem, particularly when misinformation spreads widely through viral content.

Furthermore, media legitimacy is also influenced by demographic factors. Mudjiyanto et al. (2025) confirm that younger generations, particularly generations, specifically Gen Z, tend to perceive legitimacy through visibility and virality, favouring alternative narratives from homeless media on marginalised issues, whilst older age groups continue to associate legitimacy with institutional credibility. These differences reinforce the fragmentation of authority within the digital public sphere. These differences reinforce the fragmentation of authority within the digital public sphere. Digital platforms are not merely distribution channels, but also actors that mediate the power of information. This mediating role carries significant democratic implications, as Fischer & Jarren (2024) demonstrate that the platformisation of the public sphere systematically replaces democracy-serving media logics with attention-seeking business models that are structurally indifferent to the informational needs of citizens, a condition that simultaneously privileges homeless media's reach whilst undermining its capacity to fulfil the substantive informational functions traditionally associated with journalism. This dynamic is further corroborated by Schuessler et al. (2026), who demonstrate through an analysis of YouTube that digital platforms rhetorically invoke democratic participation whilst operationally creating algorithmic hierarchies that concentrate market power and fragment public discourse, a contradiction structurally reproduced in the Indonesian local media context examined in this study.

This mediating role is particularly pronounced across Southeast Asia, where Lim (2025) demonstrates that digital platforms simultaneously enable grassroots visibility and facilitate the systematic subordination of public discourse to the commercial imperatives of platform capitalism, rendering algorithmic logic not an external disruption but the constitutive condition of contemporary media ecosystems in the region, a finding that directly contextualises the structural pressures experienced by local media such as blokBojonegoro and Wartabromo within a broader regional pattern of platform-driven authority reconstitution. Media legitimacy is now formed within a networked system, where power is no longer centralised, but rather dispersed and negotiated through interactions between actors.

Media legitimacy in the digital platform era is dynamic and constantly subject to negotiation. Local media are required to adapt to the logic of platforms without compromising journalistic principles, whilst homeless media are presented with opportunities to build alternative forms of legitimacy based on interaction. The dynamics of this shifting legitimacy underscore the fact that media are no longer static, but rather the result of an ongoing process of contestation within the digital ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study do not merely document a shift in media structure; they reveal a deeper crisis: the emergence of Algorithmic Sovereignty as the new governing logic of information production. Digital platforms have ceased to be neutral distribution channels; they are now the de facto regulators of what information reaches the public, under what conditions, and with what degree of visibility. In this new order, journalistic authority, built over decades through institutional accreditation, editorial rigour, and professional ethics, is not simply being challenged. It is being systematically bypassed by an algorithmic infrastructure that is structurally indifferent to the difference between verified truth and viral fiction.

The contestation between these two actors reflects fundamentally divergent logics of information production. Whilst the interpretative claims advanced in this study are grounded in a theoretically saturated qualitative corpus rather than a large-scale dataset, the discursive patterns identified across the 601 comments are analytically consistent with broader structural arguments concerning algorithmic governance and the erosion of institutional media authority. Such a position accords with established qualitative approaches within the international communication literature, wherein analytical depth and theoretical coherence are frequently prioritised over quantitative scale. Local media prioritise verification, depth, and adherence to journalistic standards, whereas homeless media emphasise speed, flexibility, and proximity to audiences. While this study initially conceptualised the relationship as a dual authority pattern, closer critical examination suggests a more precise characterisation as a fragile equilibrium, one that is increasingly tilting. Within the digital attention economy, speed does not merely precede

depth; it effectively forecloses it. By the time outlets such as BlokBojonegoro or Wartabromo publish verified accounts, audiences have already consumed, interpreted, and formed emotional commitments to the narratives circulated by homeless media. Consequently, verified reporting emerges not as a corrective intervention but as a 'ghost': present within the information ecosystem yet largely invisible to audiences whose cognitive frames have already been established. In this context, the institutional inertia embedded in editorial verification processes should not be understood solely as principled resistance to platform logics; rather, in real-time dynamics, it constitutes a structural disadvantage that is systematically leveraged by homeless media as algorithm natives.

Furthermore, digital platforms function not only as channels of distribution but also as influential actors that shape media legitimacy through algorithmic logics. What appears, at first glance, as a hybrid form of legitimacy is, in practice, better understood as a condition of algorithmic subjugation—wherein local media adopt platform logics not as a strategic preference but as a necessity for survival. Outlets such as BlokBojonegoro and Wartabromo engage in influencer collaborations and produce portrait-format video content not because these formats align with their journalistic values, but because algorithmic systems—effectively operating as a form of digital sovereignty—govern access to audience traffic. In this configuration, audience reach becomes contingent upon compliance with platform rules, while such compliance entails a gradual erosion of the editorial independence that has historically underpinned their authority. Consequently, a hybrid form of legitimacy emerges: local media increasingly incorporate platform-oriented practices without fully relinquishing journalistic principles, whereas homeless media construct their legitimacy primarily through interaction, engagement, and virality within the digital environment.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce key perspectives from agenda-setting, mediatisation, and Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, all of which suggest that the production and legitimisation of information in the digital age emerge from ongoing contestation among actors within a platform-mediated media arena. In this context, authority over information is no longer singular or institutionally fixed, but is instead shaped by the distribution of symbolic, social, and algorithmic capital across the digital communication ecosystem. From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the need for local media to develop adaptive strategies, including the strengthening of multi-platform approaches, innovation in content formats, and selective collaboration with digital actors in order to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive environment. At the same time, the growing dominance of algorithmic logic raises significant concerns, particularly regarding the risks of misinformation and the erosion of verification standards. These challenges point to a set of urgent and concrete policy implications. First, Dewan Pers Indonesia should consider expanding its regulatory scope to include a certification framework for homeless media—not to constrain citizen journalism, but to establish minimum standards of verification accountability that could be recognised by platform algorithms as signals of credibility. Second, major platforms operating in Indonesia, such as Meta, Google, and ByteDance, should be subject to regulatory measures, potentially through revisions to the Indonesia ITE (Electronic Information and Transactions) Law, that require the implementation of mechanisms prioritising verified local news, thereby addressing the current algorithmic bias that tends to privilege engagement over accuracy. Thus, the contestation between homeless media and local media not only reflects changes in communication technology but also marks a shift in the power structure within information production, from an institutional model towards a hybrid, dynamic media ecosystem based on digital platforms.

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