Jurnal Komunikasi ISKI, Vol. 11 (1), 2026

J U R N A L

KOMUNIKASI

IKATAN SARJANA KOMUNIKASI INDONESIA

E-ISSN: 2503-0795
P-ISSN: 2548-8740

Negotiating Algorithmic Hegemony: Influencers' Resistance Practices on Instagram

https://doi.org/10.25008/02149j05

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Submitted: November 25, 2025, **Revised**: June 14, 2026, **Accepted**: June 10, 2026
Accredited by Kemristekdikti No. 152/E/KPT/2023 until Vol 12(1) in 2027

Abstract - This study examines how Instagram influencers experience algorithmic domination and develop forms of resistance against it. The phenomenon of changes in the Instagram algorithm is interesting to study phenomenologically because it is directly related to the subjective experiences of influencers in the process of content production and distribution. The research questions cover two main issues: how influencers experience and understand the dominance (hegemony) of the Instagram algorithm in their creative activities, and how forms of counter-hegemony are carried out in response to this algorithmic pressure. This study uses Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony as the main theoretical framework to analyze how digital power operates through consent, not solely coercion. The methodology used is a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, involving ten active (Indonesian) influencer informants who were interviewed in depth to explore their experiences and reflections. The Sample size is adequate for capturing the richness of meaning rather than statistical generalization. Informants were selected to represent five categories of influencers based on follower count (nano, micro, mid-tier, macro and mega), with two informants from each category to ensure diverse perspectives. The results show that the Instagram algorithm functions as an invisible hegemonic force that normalizes compliance and shapes influencers' content production patterns. However, creators also demonstrate resistance (counter-hegemony) in the form of personal creativity, collective solidarity, and platform diversification. They negotiate the boundaries between following the algorithm and maintaining personal values as a form of agency in the digital landscape. These findings contribute to the discourse on digital media by highlighting the dialectical nature of the relationship between influencers and platforms, marked by an ongoing tension between structural domination and cultural resistance.

Keywords: Algorithmic Hegemony, Digital Labor, Social Media Influencer, Platform Power Dynamics, Phenomenological Research

Introduction

Social media algorithms have become a significant tool in shaping user experience, and influencers in building their presence and authority online. For social media users, algorithms serve up relevant content based on their behavior, interests, and previous interactions. Meanwhile, for influencers, algorithms act as a structure that helps direct content to targeted audiences, whether both

existing and new users. Influencers are defined as individuals on social media with a large following and the ability to influence their followers' behavior or decisions (Wilis & Augustina, 2022).

In the digital communications landscape, influencers serve not only as marketing tools but also as significant socio-cultural actors in shaping public opinions, lifestyles, and consumption preferences. Previous studies on travel influencers reveal that they serve as highly reliable information sources whose perceived credibility and content quality greatly influence audiences' choices (Zahara et al., 2025). Because of their more intimate, highly engaged communities, micro-influencers frequently have greater persuasive power. Influencer-based marketing strategies have become a major trend due to their proven effectiveness in increasing brand awareness and influencing consumer purchasing decisions (Hanindharputri & Putra, 2019). However, more than just a promotional medium, influencers now hold a central position as mediators between commercial values and public audiences, bridging the business world with the daily lives of their followers. Brand owners are also competing to collaborate with influencers to convey product messages broadly and effectively. In return, influencers earn income, influence, and social status that are directly proportional to the number of followers and their level of public engagement (Ramadhan et al., 2020).

This condition makes influencers become an important and relevant research subject, especially in understanding how they navigate algorithmic dynamics that determine their position in the digital space. Algorithmic changes are a major challenge for influencers because they can reduce reach and engagement of their content, creating a condition of algorithmic precarity where a previously effective content strategy can suddenly lose its impact (Cotter, 2019; Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013; Register et al., 2023; Tricomi et al., 2023). A previously effective content strategy can suddenly lose its impact. Influencers are required to quickly adapt to these changes. For example, by following popular phenomena or trends, so their content remains relevant in followers' timelines. On Instagram, an algorithm determines which content appears based on factors such as interest, timeliness, and interaction relationships (Setiyanto et al., 2021; Setyanto & Anggarina, 2016). Thus, how often a post is seen and responded to by the audience is heavily influenced by the algorithm.

As one of the most popular social media platforms, Instagram frequently updates its content display algorithm, which has a significant impact on its users and influencers which depend on visibility and engagement on the platform (Khang, 2024). These algorithm changes often create uncertainty for influencers. For example, since 2020, the dynamics of content production and distribution on Instagram have changed drastically due to an algorithm update that prioritizes short-form video formats (Reels), rapid interaction, and personalized content based on user behavior (Bishop, 2021; Cotter, 2019). These algorithmic changes influence structural aspects of influencer practices, shaping how they plan content, adapt communication strategies, and manage audience engagement. For example, the implementation of algorithmic curation raises awareness among digital content creators about the need to tailor content for specific audiences and prioritize stories with higher engagement potential (Dujeancourt & Garz, 2023). This phenomenon demonstrates a new power relationship between humans and technology, particularly between influencers and algorithms. While in conventional media, power rested with broadcasting institutions, power has now shifted to platforms and code. According to (Beer, 2019), algorithms function as new social control mechanisms that determine what is seen, when, and by whom. They function as “digital gatekeepers” which are invisible but have a large economic and psychological impact.

From a critical theory perspective, this situation illustrates the emergence of technological hegemony, which refers to ideological domination established through digital technical and economic systems (Fuchs, 2013; Kitchin, 2014). In line with Antonio Gramsci's thinking, hegemony is maintained not only through coercion, but also through consent, which is internalized by subordinate groups. In this context, influencers become hegemonic subjects because they voluntarily follow algorithmic rules to maintain their existence and profit (Baecker, 2018). This condition describes the “conformity mechanism”, as a state of obedience to domination and administration (Muris et al., 2025). However, as Gramsci (1971) emphasized, hegemony is always dynamic and contains the potential for resistance. Influencers are not completely subject to the system. They can negotiate their positions, create alternative strategies, and even resist through other forms of influence that represent acts of counter-hegemony. Social media actually provides space for the emergence of counter-culture as a form of resistance. Despite the strength of dominant ideologies, social media offers a platform for resistance and the articulation of counter-cultural narratives. In this way, digital hegemony manifests through

algorithmic structures. Social media creates the illusion of standards that deceive both influencers and audiences (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015). In practice, they are indirectly pressured to consider certain patterns and norms as the standards that "should" be followed. On the other hand, there is always room for counter-hegemony or resistance to such domination.

Algorithmic hegemony in the social media realm is neither static nor total (Mahlouly, 2013). This means that creative actors on Instagram have agency to negotiate the algorithm's influence. They can survive through adaptation or symbolic resistance. Despite widespread discussion, there remains a lack of in-depth scientific studies examining how influencers adapt to Instagram's algorithm through the lens of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

Instagram's algorithmic changes present a relevant subject for phenomenological analysis, given their impact on how influencers perceive and experience their digital practices. A phenomenological approach can reveal the meaning of an influencer's direct experience amidst these changes (Nasir et al., 2023). This study offers a more comprehensive perspective by integrating Gramscian critical analysis and a phenomenological approach to examine influencers' experiences facing algorithm changes. The phenomenological method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the informants' lived experiences as they are. Phenomenological research is a qualitative approach that aims to understand "the deepest meaning of an individual's lived experience of a particular phenomenon" (Van Manen, 2023).

Through in-depth interviews and participant reflections, this study directly explores the subjective perspectives of influencers on the changes in the Instagram algorithm, in order to understand the essence of the hegemony and counter-hegemony phenomena they experience in the digital world. Based on the description above, the research problem formulation is divided into two. First, how do influencers experience and understand the dominance (hegemony) of the ever-changing Instagram algorithm in their content creation activities? Second, what forms of counter-hegemony do influencers carry out in response to the changes and dominance of the Instagram algorithm? In line with the problem formulation above, the objectives of this study include an in-depth description of how influencers experience and interpret the dominance of the Instagram algorithm in their daily content practices and identify and analyze the forms of counter-hegemony efforts carried out by influencers in dealing with changes in the Instagram algorithm.

The research is expected to be useful in providing theoretical contributions to the study of digital communication and social media culture by applying Gramsci's concept of hegemony in the context of new media algorithms, thereby enriching the understanding of power dynamics in the platform era. Then, it demonstrates the application of a phenomenological approach in social media studies, which can serve as a methodological reference for other qualitative research on the experiences of users or influencers in the digital realm. This study also enriches the empirical discourse by documenting the experiences and strategies of influencers, especially those in Indonesia, in navigating algorithmic changes, an area still sparsely addressed in scholarly research.

A number of previous studies have also served as references in understanding this topic. Cotter examined how Instagram influencers negotiate the "visibility game" through strategies of adaptation to algorithms (Cotter, 2019). Bishop examines algorithmic precarity, namely the uncertainty experienced by digital workers due to changes in platform systems (Bishop, 2021). Bucher & Helmond describes algorithms as social entities that influence human emotions and perceptions (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Farid & Farhah found that understanding and strategically utilizing the Instagram algorithm can maximize the promotion of cultural tourism destinations, demonstrating the importance of algorithms in increasing content visibility (Farid & Farhah, 2021). Pakan & Purwanto highlighted that the presence of beauty influencers significantly influences purchasing decisions for beauty products, indicating the strong influence of influencers on consumer behavior (Pakan & Purwanto, 2022). Sundet et al also conducted a research to uncovers a complex interplay between influencers' sense of autonomy and restraints emanating from their social environment (Sundet et al., 2025).

Of these various studies, none have specifically explored an influencer's lived experience of facing algorithmic changes through a critical analysis of hegemony theory. This gap highlights the need for a phenomenological approach that focuses on the meaning of influencers' lived experience. Rather than merely describing how algorithmic power operates structurally, this study explores how such power is consciously felt, interpreted, and negotiated by individuals in their daily content practices. By

doing so, the research contributes theoretically by enriching the understanding of algorithmic hegemony through the lens of subjective meaning-making, an aspect often overlooked in structural or behavioral studies. Practically, it offers insights into how influencers can reclaim agency and develop strategies of resistance in a platform-dominated environment, thereby informing both critical media literacy and digital labor discourse.

Theoretical Framework

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony serves as the primary theoretical foundation for this research. This concept arose from a critique of classical Marxist views, which tended to view power as a purely economic form of domination. Gramsci expanded on this analysis by emphasizing that power operates not only through material control (coercion), but also through cultural and ideological control (consent). Gramsci (1971) explained that dominant power persists not only through physical or economic coercion, but through the domination of ideologies voluntarily accepted by society. In the context of modern communication, hegemony can be seen through media, technology, and the cultural industry that produce certain representations and ideologies.

As explained by Hall (2021), the media plays a role in encoding and decoding meanings that reinforce dominant values such as capitalism, consumption, or ideal beauty. Within this framework, hegemony is not static, but dynamic and always open to challenges (counter-hegemony). Gramsci emphasized that hegemony is never absolute, there are always gaps of resistance. Counter-hegemony emerges when subordinate groups begin to recognize oppressive ideological structures and create counter-values. In the context of social media, forms of counter-hegemony can include the production of authentic content that rejects algorithmic commercial aesthetics, the establishment of digital communities that support non-mainstream creativity, and platform diversification to reduce reliance on a single algorithm (Gerrard, 2016).

In the context of social media, platforms like Instagram can function as agents of digital hegemony that shape norms and values covertly through algorithmic mechanisms. Algorithms control the content users see, thus becoming a powerful tool of ideological influence. In algorithmic culture, dominant ideologies, such as neoliberal individualism, consumerism, or ideal beauty standards are encoded into algorithmic logics, influencing what content gains visibility and engagement. Algorithms thus become instruments of ideological domination by privileging certain narratives and representations that align with platform interests and prevailing socio-economic norms. As a result, influencers and audiences alike internalize these dominant values as natural or desirable aspects of digital life. This study defines ideological domination as the normalization of specific aesthetic, behavioral, or consumer norms through algorithmic amplification. Indicators of such domination include: aesthetic conformity (e.g., filters, body standards), performance pressure based on engagement metrics, prioritization of trend-based content over personal or counter-narratives, behavioral adaptation toward platform-friendly values (e.g., efficiency, virality, consistency).

Based on Gramsci's theory and the phenomenon of social media, there are five elements of digital hegemony used as an analytical framework in this study: First, “Ideological Domination,” where social media algorithms implicitly support dominant ideologies, such as ideal beauty standards or consumer lifestyles, thus shaping users' perceptions of what is considered normal or attractive in digital culture. Second, “Strategy Adjustment,” where influencers need to continuously adjust their content strategies to achieve maximum reach and engagement. They follow the logic of the prevailing algorithm, which indirectly strengthens the platform's dominance over how content is created and distributed. Third, “Resistance and Innovation,” where although influencers generally follow algorithmic patterns for relevance, some develop creative innovations as a form of subtle resistance.

These efforts can be seen as a way to maintain originality and attract follower’s attention amidst algorithmic pressure. Fourth, “Audience Influence,” where follower engagement (through likes, comments, etc.) to the content and lifestyle promoted by influencers reflects voluntary ideological consent. Audiences become part of the hegemonic process by accepting and emulating the standards presented by influencers, which simultaneously validates the algorithms that amplify similar content. Fifth, “Social Consequences,” where content circulated through influencers impacts changes in social behavior and values, particularly related to consumerism and perceptions of beauty in society. Recent research on fatherhood communities on Instagram, based on persuasion studies, demonstrates that users process influencer content in both central and peripheral ways, combining heuristic cues like source

relatability, emotional tone, and visual appeal with careful consideration of parenting messages (Wiradisuria et al., 2025).

This implies that algorithmically promoted content can obtain permission through subtle, emotionally charged forms of persuasion incorporated into regular posts in addition to overt ideology. Research on Instagram personal branding shows that audiences do not merely consume content passively through likes, comments, and even negative reactions, followers actively co-produce an influencer's visibility and social capital. In the case of @barbiekumalasari, negative stigma, harsh remarks, and bullying paradoxically increased fame and popularity, demonstrating how audience engagement feeds into the platform's algorithmic logic of controversy and attention (Rubiyanto & Fildyanti, 2021).

The conceptual framework above emphasizes the relevance of hegemony theory in social media studies. In this study, hegemony theory is used to analyze how influencers not only play a role in disseminating information but also have the potential to innovate as a form of counter-hegemony. The influence of the Instagram platform and its algorithm on influencer strategies, as well as their impact on audience behavior, is the focus in understanding the role of influencers as opinion leaders in the digital cultural realm. This theoretical approach provides a foundation for critically interpreting the research's empirical findings.

Material and Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. The research paradigm is interpretative-critical, where the subject's experience is understood in depth and analyzed using the perspective of hegemony theory. This combination is aligned with Creswell who emphasize that phenomenology within an interpretative paradigm seeks to capture the essence of lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2022), while a critical stance allows researchers to uncover the ideological structures that shape those experiences, making it compatible with Gramsci's concept of hegemonic power. The phenomenological approach was chosen to explore the meaning of influencers' subjective experiences related to changes in the Instagram algorithm. The phenomenological approach emphasizes understanding the meaning of experiences as directly experienced by individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, this study not only analyzes digital power structures theoretically but also explores how hegemony and counter-hegemony are lived out in influencers' everyday experiences.

In this study, data was collected through in depth interviews of ten (10) informants, all of whom are influencers (in Indonesia) active on Instagram. The informants were selected purposively within these criteria: *First*, this selection takes into account representation from each category based on the number of followers on their social media accounts: (1) nano influencers with one thousand to 10 thousand followers, (2) micro influencers with 10 thousand to 100 thousand followers, (3) mid-tier influencers with 100 thousand to 500 thousand followers, (4) macro influencers with 500 thousand to 1 million followers, and (5) mega influencers with more than 1 million followers (Fejes, 2025; Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025; Kay et al., 2020; Şenyapar, 2024; Yuan & Lou, 2020).

A sample size of ten informants is considered sufficient in phenomenological approach because the focus is not on statistical generalizations, but rather on the depth of meaning and the diversity of subjective experiences. Each category was represented by two informants to ensure a diversity of perspective across different levels of digital influencer. *Second*, all influencers have been actively creating and uploading content consistently for at least the past two years. *Third*, all influencers use Instagram as the main medium in building personal branding and/or earning income. *Fourth*, all influencers have experienced the direct impact of changes in the Instagram algorithm, both in terms of reach, engagement, and content adaptation. *Fifth*, all influencers are willing to explain their experiences, strategies, and personal reflections openly and in depth.

Data collection techniques were carried out through semi-structured interviews with an average duration of 45–75 minutes per session. Interviews were conducted online (via Zoom) and recorded with the informant's consent, then transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes. All informant identities were disguised in the form of codes (I1–I10) to maintain confidentiality and research ethics. The data analysis process followed the stages in interpretive phenomenology which included: Reading the transcript in its entirety to understand the context of the experience; Marking significant statements (meaning units) related to the research theme, namely the experience of hegemony and counter-hegemony in facing

algorithms; Grouping meaning units into thematic themes (thematic of algorithmic pressure, adaptation strategies, forms of resistance, and reflection of consciousness); Compiling textural descriptions (what was experienced) and structural descriptions (how the experience was experienced); Concluding the essence of the experience based on cross-informants.

Data validity was maintained through triangulation between informants and checking the analysis results with two main informants (member checking) to ensure the appropriateness of interpretation. Furthermore, researchers conducted continuous self-reflection (bracketing) to minimize interpretive bias. Through this method, the research is expected to represent the diversity of influencers' experiences in facing the dominance of the Instagram algorithm, as well as illustrate how symbolic or counter-hegemony is executed in the context of digital content production.

Results and Discussion

The results of interviews with ten Instagram influencers (hereinafter referred to as informants) show the dynamics of the relationship between influencers and platforms that can be explained through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Five main dimensions are analyzed in an integrated manner: (1) Technological hegemony as invisible domination by algorithm; (2) Internalization of ideology algorithmic by influencers; (3) Approval and adaptation influencers against platform rules; (4) Counter-hegemony in the form of subtle or open resistance strategies; and (5) Phenomenological reflection, this includes critical awareness and influencers' efforts to maintain their authenticity amidst algorithmic pressures. Each dimension is discussed along with empirical findings (direct quotes from informants) and related theoretical insights.

Algorithmic Hegemony as Invisible Domination

Gramsci defined hegemony as a veiled domination subtly accepted by society. In the context of social media, the Instagram algorithm operates like an invisible hegemonic force. This power controls the rules of the game without its users fully realizing it. This technological hegemony is reflected in how the algorithm dominates content distribution and the daily behavioral patterns of informants. Informants perceive the Instagram algorithm as having immense power. Although invisible and not an explicit command, the algorithm's work is felt through its impact.

Informants described algorithms as mysterious and unpredictable entities. For example, Rezky's statement reflects the confusion influencers experience when carefully crafted content fails to gain exposure, while simple content can go viral. This demonstrates the incongruity between influencers' creative logic and algorithmic logic. As he put it, "The Instagram algorithm is sometimes... mysterious," the video illustrates the dominance of algorithms that regulate content visibility in a non-transparent manner. When creativity is no longer enough, and success is determined by an unpredictable system, a power relationship emerges in which algorithms become the hegemon that dictates the direction of meaning production in the digital space.

Clarissa also highlighted the recent drastic changes to Instagram's algorithm, which have had a more negative impact, making her increasingly dependent on social media: "The algorithm is powerful… the changes are significant and for me, there are pluses and minuses, maybe more minuses, because… it's very dependent on social media. She explained that since the algorithm prioritized the Reels video format, her content engagement has plummeted, despite consistently producing quality content. Clarissa felt forced to change her upload format and frequency to adapt, even though it didn't always align with her personal style or interests. "This recognition reflects technological hegemony, where algorithms exert dominance to the point that influencers feel their lives are heavily influenced (even controlled) by the platform. Algorithmic hegemony is also evident in influencers' content creation. For Shahnaz, the choice of background music is based on what's trending: "I what is this, yeah, what's currently hyped, huh? "..." Oh, he's using this sound, here, for example, going up." "Oh, yeah, this sound is trending. Okay, just use it."

The impact of algorithmic hegemony is also evident in the fluctuations in metrics experienced by influencers. For example, Rezky faced a situation where the algorithm affects not only her content strategy but also her psychological well-being and professional stability. The daily fluctuations in followers and views, especially during brand deal negotiations or campaign launches, triggered anxiety and pressure to constantly track performance metrics. Rezky mentioned the ups and downs in the number of followers and views daily as a major source of anxiety. This phenomenon demonstrates a

subtle form of algorithmic control. Without directly "forcing," the algorithm creates a situation where influencers feel anxious and constantly vigilant about performance figures.

For Gramsci, effective domination occurs when the values and conditions determined by the ruler (in this case the platform and its algorithm) are accepted as taken for granted. Similarly, influencers are accustomed to the fact that the reach and visibility of their content is entirely determined by Instagram's opaque internal mechanisms. Prilly, one of the mega-informants with over one million followers and a long-standing presence as a beauty and lifestyle influencer in Indonesia, expressed a balanced perspective toward algorithmic demands: "I never force or make any special efforts to maintain high engagement, because I know it fluctuates a lot." This algorithmic hegemony, in turn, shapes opportunity structures, such as favoring certain content while limiting the reach of others, without any clear explanation. As a result, influencers often feel like they're "playing in the dark" under the algorithm's invisible domination.

Internalization of Algorithmic Ideology

Hegemony works not only through external domination, but also through the internalization of ideology by the dominated group. According to Gramsci, the ruling class maintains hegemony when its values are adopted as "common sense" by society. In this case, the dominant algorithmic values, such as the importance of engagement, number view, followers, as well as following platform trends, are absorbed into the influencers' mindsets. Findings suggest that many influencers subconsciously internalize the logic and demands of the Instagram algorithm as a guide for their creativity.

One indication of the internalization of algorithmic ideology is an obsession with performance metrics. Informants acknowledged that fluctuating numbers can influence their emotions and self-evaluations. Rezky, for example, felt anxious when he saw "followers go up and down, views go up and down," which for him "definitely a concern". This statement indicates that he has absorbed an algorithmic perspective, where fluctuating numbers are considered crucial and cause for concern. Platform metrics, which are essentially system constructs, have become a kind of success ideology for influencers. They begin to believe that their self-worth or the quality of their content is tied to these numbers.

Furthermore, internalization is evident in how influencers adopt the algorithm's "rules of the game" into their daily habits. Algorithmic discipline develops when influencers feel compelled to comply with the system's preferred patterns. For example, Dustin faced a situation where the pressure to stay visible in followers' feeds led him to reshape his daily routine around the algorithm. He adjusted his schedule to ensure at least one post per day, believing that consistency was key to "maintaining" the algorithm's favor. Dustin exemplifies this by implementing a strict posting schedule to maintain the algorithm's favor: "I have to upload to Instagram once a day to maintain the algorithm."

Dustin's belief that daily posting frequency will "maintain" the algorithm demonstrates the internalization of the idea that the algorithm is like a living being that needs to be "maintained" by its attention. Similarly, other influencers are beginning to see it as normal to always stay up-to-date on new features or trends released by Instagram. While not all influencers diligently monitor every change, it's generally apparent that "algorithmic ideology" among influencers. For example, content must be tailored to system preferences (duration, Reels format, use of viral music, etc.) to achieve optimal results. Dominant values such as engagement rate, niche relevance, and current trends are internalized into influencers' personal standards in assessing their content strategy. From Gramsci's perspective, this process marks the formation of Instagram's cultural leadership as the dominant force. This dominance then leads influencers to voluntarily accept the algorithm's logic as their own.

Influencer Consent and Adaptation to Platform Rules

Hegemony persists not only because of coercion, but also because consent of those dominated. Gramsci emphasized that cultural domination forces subordinate groups to voluntarily conform to the rules of the existing structure. Research findings demonstrate the influencers' implicit consent to Instagram's "rules of the game." This consent is evident through various adaptations influencers make to align with the platform's wishes. Rather than resisting a system they perceive as burdensome, most informants instead seek to accommodate algorithmic demands into their creative strategies. This

adaptation is a concrete manifestation of consent, where informants are willing to change their behavior and content according to parameters deemed favorable by Instagram, in the hope of remaining viable and thriving within the ecosystem.

The first adaptive strategy that stands out is adjusting the content niche or topic. Informants learned that algorithms tend to distribute content more effectively when accounts have a niche. Rezky explicitly suggests the importance of thematic focus as an adaptation to the algorithm: “That's why... content creators have to determine a niche, because that's how to narrow down the number of netizens who will follow us.”. This statement demonstrates the influencer's willingness to follow the platform's logic of prioritizing specialization. In other words, the influencer agrees unwritten rules Instagram dictates that they “go too wide” if they want the algorithm to favor them. Apart from establishing a niche, influencers also constantly monitor trends and insight performance to re-strategize.

Clarissa said that changing content concepts is inevitable as algorithms change: “These changes must always be made... adjustments, changing concepts, adjustments again.” Clarissa's statement reflects the ethos of adaptation that influencers live by. To satisfy the algorithm, they are willing to adjust their content type, presentation style, upload times, and various other factors. In this way, influencers appear to demonstrate compliance with the “will” dynamic algorithm. Furthermore, informants explicitly demonstrated compliance with platform rules, for example regarding community guidelines or technical policies.

Some informants admitted to trying to avoid violations such as spam, copyrighted content, or sensitive speech, because they were aware of the algorithmic consequences (decreased visibility up to shadow ban). There is a tacit agreement that “playing by the rules” is the price to pay for continued existence. This aligns with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, namely that Instagram’s power over influencers exists because the influencers themselves accept the platform's norms as legitimate. Their consent manifests itself in proactive obedience and adjustment, rather than resistance. In other words, influencers voluntarily become “agents” which reinforce algorithmic hegemony through their adaptive actions. While this adaptation is useful for survival, theoretically it confirms the strong hegemonic grip of technology because influencers no longer question the rules of the game, but rather internalize and practice it in everyday creative practice.

Counter-Hegemony: Influencer Resistance Strategies

Despite its dominance, hegemony is never without resistance. Gramsci argued that in the cracks of the hegemonic structure, counter-hegemony, namely, counter-efforts by subordinate groups to reject or change the status quo. These findings identify various forms of resistance, both subtle and explicit, from informants to Instagram's algorithmic pressure. This resistance does not always take the form of overt confrontation but is often disguised in informants' strategic choices that deviate from the algorithm's will. The emergence of these attitudes indicates that informants are not completely “submissive.” They possess the agency to question and outwit the system to maintain control over their work and themselves.

One common form of counter-hegemony is mental resistance to algorithmic obsession. Some influencers choose to change their mindset to avoid being constantly pressured by the need to go viral or achieve numbers engagement. Rezky, for example, finally took the stance of no longer bothering with his status. “FYP” (Trending) content. He stated that he now creates content in a more relaxed and organic way, “Just be natural so there's no burden, instead of chasing virality (attitude letting go)”. This is a subtle resistance to the platform's ideology that measures success by whether a post goes viral. Similarly, Prilly (a mega-influencer) admitted “don't push yourself”. He pursues the highest possible engagement figures. He accepts that performance fluctuations are natural and chooses to focus on the things he can control: “I never force or make any special efforts to maintain high engagement, because I know it fluctuates a lot.” Prilly's statement reflects a rejection of the hegemonic pressure to always be perfect in the eyes of the algorithm as a form of covert defiance by reducing emotional dependence on Instagram's artificial metrics.

Besides mental resistance, there are also creative strategies that defy the algorithmic flow. Dimas, for example, openly doesn't follow the commercial formula Instagram perceives as desirable. He prioritizes his personal vision and message in educational content, rather than pursuing viral content that generates revenue: “Instagram wants content that makes money... but that's not the main thing for me. I always prioritize what I want to convey.” This is a form of firm counter-hegemony, where he is

aware of the platform's ideological orientation (profit and popularity) but chooses not to agree with it. In fact, some informants are willing to turn down endorsement offers or paid collaborations that do not align with their values, in order to maintain the integrity of the content. These steps are a real resistance to the platform's political-economic dominance as influencers assert their autonomy by not allowing algorithms and financial incentives to completely dictate the direction of their creativity.

Time management is also an influencer's attempt to free themself from the hegemonic constraints imposed by algorithms, namely the demand to be constantly connected and react to the relentless flow of information. For example, Shahnaz, by "minding" her usage time, reclaimed some autonomy from the system that typically dictates the rhythm of interaction and content production. This aligns with Gramsci's concept of "war of position," a cultural struggle that occurs through the formation of awareness and practices of resistance in everyday spaces, rather than through direct confrontation. By limiting her use of Instagram, she did not necessarily reject the platform, but rather positioned herself more critically and autonomously within the hegemonic system, making this practice a micro-yet-significant form of resistance to algorithmic pressure.

There are also indications of collective resistance and solidarity among influencers in an effort to confront platform hegemony. Several informants recounted that when Instagram's algorithm changed and content reach plummeted simultaneously, influencers openly shared their grievances. They created posts (for example, on InstaStories) questioning the platform's policies: "Why is Instagram so sensitive? Viewers are plummeting.", complained one influencer, receiving a similar response from his peers. Through informal discussions within the influencer community, they mutually confirmed that the decline in performance was not solely the fault of individuals, but rather the impact of the system.

This action demonstrates the emergence of a collective awareness of algorithmic injustice and can be seen as the seeds of counter-hegemony: influencers uniting behind a narrative "us vs algorithm" instead of blaming yourself. Furthermore, some influencers are implementing cross-platform strategies to counter their dependence on Instagram. They expand their audience to TikTok, YouTube, or other platforms, thereby reducing Instagram's power over their careers. One informant even advocated for not relying on a single platform, saying, "It could be that different platforms have different viral effects.", where content that is underappreciated on Instagram might actually be successful on other social media. This cross-platform expansion challenges Instagram's sole hegemony by creating match rooms beyond the reach of its algorithm.

Theoretically, the various forms of resistance mentioned above are manifestations of Gramsci's counter-hegemony in the digital age. Even if small and scattered, every proactive action by influencers to defy algorithms is an attempt to reclaim agency from dominant structures. Whether through mindset change, community solidarity, or engaging content, out of the box, and platform diversification, influencers demonstrate that they are not passive subjects. Instagram's algorithmic hegemony is thus being challenged by savvy users who negotiate the rules, even pushing their boundaries, in order to maintain their creative and psychological independence.

Phenomenological Reflection: Critical Consciousness and Authenticity

The last dimension raised is phenomenological reflection, namely the influencer's critical awareness of the system that protects them and the effort to maintain authenticity amidst these pressures. Gramsci believed that change begins when the dominated group achieves critical consciousness, where they recognize the restrictive hegemonic conditions and then articulate a desire for independence. In this study, several informants showed signs of such critical awareness. They reflected on their daily experiences on Instagram from a broader perspective, for example, noting that their freedom of expression is actually restricted, and that their social media self-image is shaped by external demands (algorithms, followers, or brands). This awareness is important because it is the first step for influencers to distance themselves from dominant ideologies and affirm authentic personal values.

One informant vividly revealed the reality of platforms in the algorithmic era: "Social media is no longer a platform for free expression, but a platform for advocacy… so that it is in line with the brand's wishes and the demands of a good image" Prilly's statement demonstrates her awareness that Instagram has shifted from a space for spontaneous expression to one full of calculated imagery. She understands that everything posted must be considered for its impact on brand image and public perception. In other words, influencers are aware of the existence of ideological pressure, which is a

kind of "soft grip" that requires them to conform to dominant norms (content must be positive vibes, aesthetic, brand-friendly, etc.).

A similar phenomenological awareness was expressed by another informant (Ida), who reminded herself not to lose her identity due to being swept away by the flow of algorithms. She emphasized the need to maintain personal autonomy: "We shouldn't be too controlled by the algorithm, otherwise we'll end up trying to chase what Instagram wants, even though that's not our intention." This reflective statement demonstrates a deep understanding that following the algorithm's every whim can potentially diminish the authenticity of the influencer's intentions and creativity. There is a critical distance created between "Instagram's will" and "our own will" which is a separation that is at the heart of resistance in the realm of consciousness.

As this awareness grows, influencers are striving to maintain their authenticity amidst platform pressures. They are beginning to redefine success not just in terms of numbers, but also in terms of personal satisfaction and meaningful engagement with audiences. Some influencers emphasize that remaining true to themselves is more important than meeting the expectations of algorithms and sponsors. "It's more torturous for him not to be himself on social media than not to get a brand," Prilly explained, referring to a colleague's experience, "and that's each person's choice. This confirms that for many influencers, losing authenticity felt to be far more psychologically detrimental than losing a commercial opportunity. Therefore, they choose to set boundaries by rejecting content or collaborations that conflict with personal values even if it may mean slower growth or lower engagement. These kinds of attitudes reflect the emergence of "good sense" (critical common sense) above "common sense" Hegemonic. In other words, influencers are starting to discern what is truly valuable to them, instead of blindly pursuing what the platform's logic deems valuable.

This phenomenon of critical reflection and the struggle for authenticity shows an advanced stage in the dialectic of hegemony, namely a kind of cultural emancipation at the individual level, influencers who are aware of Instagram's dominance game tend to be better able to maintain their mental health and the integrity of their content. They view the platform as a tool, not the absolute determinant of their identity. For some informants (for example, those who consider social media a side hobby), this awareness even makes them immune to pressure: algorithm fluctuations "don't really affect" their lives. However, even for those who rely heavily on Instagram for their careers, critical awareness helps balance the perspective that beyond the algorithmic hype there is real life and authentic values to be preserved. This is in line with Gramsci's ultimate goal of counter-hegemony, where subordinates are able to develop conscious leadership. In short, influencers' phenomenological reflections on algorithmic systems open up space for the creation of more authentic and autonomous identities, ones that aren't completely submerged in technological hegemony.

Conclusions

Through a phenomenological approach to ten Instagram influencers, this study found that algorithms operate as an invisible hegemonic force, profoundly shaping creators' behavior and consciousness. Influencers experience algorithms as mysterious entities that induce anxiety and dependency, while internalizing algorithmic values such as adherence to trends and platform logic. This is reflected in their consciously implemented adaptive strategies, ranging from adjusting content and upload frequency to optimizing broadcast time. However, this domination is not absolute, as influencers also engage in various forms of counter-hegemony: from selecting content aligned with personal values, forming sharing communities to counter algorithmic pressure, to expanding their presence to other platforms like TikTok and YouTube to reduce dependency.

Critical reflection also encourages them to negotiate the limits of compliance with algorithms, by rejecting commercial partnerships that align with their values or choosing to maintain authentic expression as a form of symbolic resistance. The results of this study confirm that the relationship between influencers and algorithms is a constantly evolving dialectical relationship between domination and agency, demonstrating that digital power is always open to reinterpretation and cultural resistance.

The academic suggestions from this research are: Further research should more deeply explore how influencers subjectively construct the *meaning* of algorithms in their daily lives. A phenomenological approach can be further expanded to reveal the intentionality, embodiment, and structure of lived experience, aspects that remain underexplored in current scholarship. For instance,

how influencers perceive the algorithm not merely as a technical mechanism, but as an almost "sentient" force that must be obeyed or negotiated with, could be examined more systematically. This deeper inquiry will contribute to the theoretical development of algorithmic hegemony as not only a structural condition, but also a lived reality.

Building on this, further research using combined methodologies, such as in-depth phenomenological interviews, digital ethnography, and discourse analysis can provide a richer understanding of algorithmic meaning-making. Quantitative methods like platform data analysis and engagement metrics may complement this by revealing broader behavioral patterns. Cross-platform comparison (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok or YouTube) is also essential to understand whether algorithmic power operates uniformly across different media ecosystems or varies by platform architecture.

Practically, influencers should be equipped with greater algorithmic literacy to navigate their content strategies more critically, rather than passively adjusting to platform demands. Social media platforms themselves bear responsibility in fostering this balance by increasing transparency and offering fairer content distribution mechanisms. Ultimately, both creators and platforms must co-construct a more equitable digital culture, one in which the hegemonic logic of algorithmic dominance is continuously questioned, negotiated, and restructured by its users.

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