

The Power-Knowledge Relationship in Media Political Discourse: A Foucauldian Analysis

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Keywords:

political discourse, media, knowledge-power, Foucauldian, literary studies

Abstract

This study examines the power–knowledge relationship in media political discourse through a Foucauldian perspective, focusing on how contemporary digital media construct political truth in the era of platform-based communication. The background of this research lies in the transformation of media from a conventional information channel into a digital ecosystem where algorithms, data-driven systems, and platform infrastructures actively shape political narratives and public perception. The objective of this study is to analyze how media function as a discursive apparatus that produces, regulates, and legitimizes political knowledge in society. The research employs a qualitative approach using a narrative literature review design. Data were collected from relevant scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic publications related to Michel Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge, discourse, governmentality, and subjectivity. The data were analyzed through literature reduction, thematic categorization, and critical interpretation to construct a conceptual synthesis. The findings indicate that media play a central role in constructing regimes of truth through mechanisms of selection, framing, repetition, and exclusion of political narratives. In the digital era, these mechanisms are further intensified by algorithmic systems that govern information visibility and user engagement. The discussion also highlights that digital media not only distribute information but also shape political identity and subjectivity through continuous discursive interaction. In conclusion, media political discourse operates as a dynamic power structure where knowledge is continuously produced and contested. This study emphasizes that understanding media requires a critical awareness of their role in shaping truth, power relations, and political subject formation in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital communication technology has fundamentally changed contemporary political communication practices. Media are no longer understood solely as a channel for transmitting messages between political actors and the public, but have developed into a space for the production of meaning, a symbolic battle arena, and an instrument for the formation of political legitimacy. The development of digital platforms, social media, and data-driven communication systems has accelerated the production, distribution, and consumption of political information on a global scale. Various platforms such as Meta Platforms, TikTok, and others not only provide a space for political interaction, but also form a communication architecture that governs the visibility of messages, participation patterns, and the distribution of public attention (Meikle 2016; Bossetta 2023). Recent studies show that the digital

architecture and algorithmic systems of platforms play an important role in shaping polarization, the spread of political narratives, and the construction of public opinion in the digital space (Bossetta, 2018; Pacheco-Ortiz et al., 2026).

For decades, the study of political communication developed through approaches such as agenda-setting theory, framing, cultivation, and media political economy (Van Aelst dan Walgrave 2016; Kim *et al.* 2017; Buturoiu *et al.* 2023). These approaches have made a significant contribution to explaining how the media influence people's perceptions, attitudes, and political behavior. However, most of these approaches still place the media as a message-delivery tool or a representative arena of reality, so that they do not fully explain how the media actively shape the boundaries of political knowledge, determine narratives that gain legitimacy, and construct what the public accepts as social truth.

In this context, Michel Foucault's thought offers a critical perspective through the concepts of power/knowledge, discourse, regime of truth, and governmentality. Foucault asserts that power does not work solely through repressive mechanisms of domination, but through the production of knowledge, the normalization of social practices, and the formation of subjectivity. Thus, knowledge never stands neutral, but is always produced, circulated, and legitimized within a network of power relations. Contemporary studies also show that the Foucauldian perspective remains relevant in understanding how language, representation, and communication practices shape power relations in modern public spaces (Kelly, 2020).

In a Foucauldian perspective, the media can be understood as a discursive apparatus that not only conveys political information, but also produces social categories, forms political identities, and determines who has the legitimacy to speak in public spaces. Through the practice of issue selection, the determination of information sources, language construction, narrative repetition, and the exclusion of alternative discourses, the media play a role in forming a regime of truth, that is, a discursive system that determines which knowledge is considered valid, rational, and socially acceptable. The study of media power based on the Foucauldian perspective shows that the media serve as a normalization mechanism that subtly regulates the way the public understands social and political reality (Syahputra, 2017).

In the digital age, the mechanisms of power have become increasingly complex. Digital platforms not only work through editorial processes like conventional media, but also through algorithmic systems, content personalization, the datafication of user behavior, and the automation of information distribution. This condition gives rise to a new form of digital governmentality, in which the management of public political behavior is carried out through technology, data, and digital platform infrastructure. Recent studies have shown that political communication on social media is increasingly influenced by the technological structure of platforms, which shapes patterns of participation, interaction, and consumption of political information in a systematic manner (Bossetta, 2018; Amores et al., 2026).

The study of power relations and media discourse has attracted the attention of a number of researchers from a variety of different perspectives and contexts. In his article "A Longitudinal Examination of Foucault's Theory of Discourse," published in the Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Zhiyi (2023) describes a qualitative study based on library research that traces the evolution of Foucault's theory of discourse from internal and external aspects. Drawing on data collected from primary sources in the form of Foucault's works as well as secondary sources in relevant articles and books, this study contributes to mapping the

conceptual development of Foucault's theory historiographically, but stops at the level of theoretical elaboration without linking it to the concrete practices of media and political communication. Thus, this study does not provide an analysis of how the concept operates in the context of mass media discourse or digital platforms. Bhattarai (2020), in turn, examines "Discourse, Power, and Truth" from a Foucauldian perspective using a qualitative interpretivist study design based on a literature review. This study succeeds in confirming that discourse, power, and truth have contextual interpretations; nevertheless, this research is purely conceptual-philosophical and does not reach an analysis of how these power-knowledge mechanisms specifically work through the discursive practices of the media in political contexts.

Based on previous research, there are several research gaps that need to be considered. First, the two studies above apply the Foucauldian framework only partially, relying on just one or two concepts without systematically integrating the entire mechanism of the production of the truth regime, which includes narrative selection, the legitimacy of actors, and the normalization of discourse as one coherent discursive system. Second, there has been no study that specifically places media political discourse as an object of analysis using a narrative review design from a Foucauldian perspective, even though this approach allows for a more comprehensive critical synthesis of power dynamics in the contemporary media landscape.

Although the Foucauldian concept has been widely used in the study of education, health, social governance, and cultural studies, its application in the study of media political communication—especially studies that examine digital media as a mechanism of political knowledge production—is still relatively limited and has not been widely synthesized conceptually. Most previous studies have focused more on the analysis of content, media effects, or audience behavior, while studies that specifically place the media as a discursive apparatus in power-knowledge relations are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the power-knowledge relationship in media political discourse through a literature study with a Foucauldian perspective, in order to build a more critical conceptual understanding of the role of media in the production of political truth in the digital era.

In addition to changing the pattern of information distribution, media digitalization has changed the way political knowledge is produced. In the era of conventional media, editorial journalism institutions and media organizations were largely responsible for the legitimacy of information. However, in the era of digital platforms, this authority is delegated to algorithms that function through the logic of engagement, popularity, and predictions of user behavior. Studies show that digital platform algorithms act as new gatekeepers that determine which content gains high visibility and which is marginalized in the digital public space; in the political context, this condition means that the production of knowledge is no longer completely controlled by political actors or media institutions, but also by a technological infrastructure that works in an inconsistently transparent manner (Napoli, 2014; Gillespie, 2018).

These changes have given rise to new phenomena in political communication in the form of information fragmentation, echo chambers, and the polarization of public opinion. A study conducted by Cass Sunstein shows that the personalization of information in the digital space can strengthen exposure to information that aligns with the user's ideological preferences, thereby reducing the likelihood of deliberative dialogue between political groups. Recent

empirical research has also shown that social media platforms' recommendation systems contribute to the strengthening of political identity, increased partisan affection, and the reproduction of discursive conflicts in digital public spaces. This condition shows that digital media are not just a medium of communication, but a social mechanism that actively shapes the configuration of people's political knowledge (Cinelli et al., 2021).

In a Foucauldian perspective, this transformation can be described as a shift in the form of power from an institutional model to a more dispersed, productive model integrated into technological systems. Power no longer comes solely from the state, political parties, or official institutions, but now also from platform design, data classification systems, content distribution methods, and information automation processes. The concept of governmentality developed by Michel Foucault becomes relevant for explaining how individuals are directed, guided, and governed through digital practices that appear to be participatory, but actually work through the logic of surveillance, prediction, and behavior management (Lupton, 2016).

Furthermore, various studies show that digital media not only influence how political information is consumed, but also how political identities are constructed and negotiated. Repeated interactions with specific political narratives, ideological symbols, and digital communities form a process of political subjectivization, that is, the process by which individuals build an understanding of themselves, their groups, and their political positions through available discourses. In this context, the media serve as a space for the production of subjectivity that continuously reproduces certain political values, norms, and categories. As Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp argue, this perspective expands the understanding of political communication from a mere process of persuasion to the process of forming social and political subjects (Li, 2017).

Although various studies have discussed the influence of digital media on political behavior, citizen participation, and democratic dynamics, studies that specifically integrate the concepts of power/knowledge, discourse, governmentality, and the production of subjectivity within a single analytical framework are still relatively limited. Some Foucauldian research in the field of media still focuses on issues of representation, identity, or popular culture, while a conceptual synthesis that places digital political communication as an arena for the production of truth regimes has not been developed systematically. This gap is an important basis for this research, which offers a more critical reading of the power-knowledge relationship in media political discourse through a literature study approach based on a Foucauldian perspective.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative literature study approach with a narrative review design. This approach was chosen because the research aims to examine, interpret, and synthesize various theoretical ideas and findings of previous research related to power-knowledge relations, discourse, media, and political communication from the perspective of Michel Foucault. A narrative review allows the researcher to build a deeper conceptual understanding, especially in studies oriented toward the development of theoretical arguments, the identification of thought patterns, and the mapping of the development of academic discourse on the topic being studied.

The data sources in this study consist of secondary academic literature comprising books, scientific journal articles, conference proceedings, and other academic works relevant to the research focus. The literature search was carried out through several academic databases. The search process was conducted using a combination of keywords. The use of these various keywords aims to obtain literature capable of representing the development of studies on power relations, knowledge production, and discursive practices in the context of contemporary political communication.

The collected literature was then selected based on several inclusion criteria. First, the literature must have a direct relationship with the main concepts in Michel Foucault's thought. Second, the literature must discuss media, political communication, digital media, or the practice of knowledge production in the public space. Third, the prioritized sources are scientific publications that have gone through a peer-review process, especially international journal articles, academic books, and empirical research published in the last ten years, without neglecting Foucault's classical works as the main theoretical foundation. This selection process was carried out to ensure that the literature used has conceptual relevance, academic quality, and an up-to-date study context.

Data analysis was carried out through three stages. The first stage is literature reduction, that is, the process of identifying, critically reading, and selecting sources that accord with the research focus. At this stage, literature that is not directly related to the theme of power-knowledge relations and media political discourse was eliminated. The second stage is thematic categorization, that is, grouping the literature based on the main themes that emerge, which the researcher then organized as follows: the media as a discursive apparatus, the production of the truth regime, digital governmentality, the algorithmization of political communication, and the formation of political subjectivity. The third stage is critical interpretation, that is, the process of interpreting the various findings in the literature using a Foucauldian perspective to build a conceptual synthesis of how the power-knowledge relationship works in media political discourse.

Through these stages, this research not only seeks to describe the development of the existing literature, but also builds a critical reading of the media as a mechanism for the production of political knowledge and the reproduction of power in the ecology of contemporary digital communication. Thus, this approach is expected to produce a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of the dynamics of media political discourse from a Foucauldian perspective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Media as a Discursive Apparatus

Literature review shows that the media has a much more complex function than just an information delivery channel. In the development of contemporary political communication, the media has transformed into a space for the production of meaning, an arena of symbolic contestation, and a mechanism of legitimacy of power that affects the way people understand political reality. The media not only conveys facts, but also selects, classifies, interprets, and reproduces various narratives that are then accepted by the public as representations of social and political reality. In this context, the media has the ability to determine which issues are

considered important, which actors gain speaking space, which perspectives are considered legitimate, and which narratives gain legitimacy in the public sphere.

Michel Foucault's perspective provides a relevant analytical framework for understanding the strategic position of the media in the process. For Foucault, discourse is not just a collection of languages, texts, or verbal communication, but is a social practice that produces objects of knowledge while regulating how those objects can be understood, talked about, and treated in society. Discourse sets rules about what can and cannot be said, who has the right to speak and reliable and reasonable information. Thus, discourse always operates in power relations that produce and reproduce certain social structures.

In the context of political media, editorial practices, the selection of news sources, the use of terminology, the construction of titles, information visualization, and framing strategies are concrete forms of discourse production. Every editorial decision is not only a journalistic technical decision, but also a social practice that determines the construction of political meaning in the public sphere. When the media chooses to use terms such as "national stability", "radicalism", "populism", "democracy", or "threat to the state", the terms do not present neutrally, but carry an ideological content that affects the way the public understands political reality.

Norman Fairclough's study shows that media language has the ability to form social relationships, build collective identities, and strengthen power relations in society. In the political context, the language of the media serves as an instrument that not only depicts reality, but also shapes social reality through symbolic representation. Therefore, the media can be understood as a *discursive apparatus*, that is, a social apparatus that actively produces political knowledge and shapes the boundaries of public truth.

Contemporary studies also show that modern media works through increasingly complex symbolic mechanisms. According to Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, social reality in the digital age is increasingly mediated by communication infrastructure that shapes the way individuals understand the social world. In this condition, the media not only represents politics, but becomes part of the political practice itself. The media becomes an arena where political identities are formed, ideological conflicts are negotiated, and social legitimacy is produced continuously.

Power Relations and the Production of Political Truth

One of the most important contributions of Michel Foucault's thought is the concept of *power/knowledge* or power-knowledge relations. Foucault rejected the view that power only works through domination, repression, or direct control of formal institutions. On the contrary, power works productively by generating knowledge, forming norms, regulating social categories, and determining the standards of truth that society accepts. In this perspective, power is not in one particular center, but is spread through a network of institutions, social practices, languages, and knowledge systems.

In the context of the media, the power-knowledge relationship can be seen through the process of news production, information distribution, and normalization of political narratives. The media has the ability to determine which issues are of public interest and which are ignored. This ability makes the media not only a conveyor of information, but a producer of political reality. The literature suggests that this process takes place through several key mechanisms.

First, the media selects political issues. Not all political events receive the same attention. The media determines which events are considered worthy of reporting based on news value, institutional importance, ideological orientation, and audience calculations. This selection process directly shapes public perceptions of political priorities.

Second, the media legitimizes certain political actors. Actors who gain greater access to the media have a greater chance of building a positive image and gaining public legitimacy. On the other hand, actors with minimal access can experience symbolic marginalization.

Third, the media repeats the dominant narrative. The constant repetition of information shapes a collective perception of what is considered normal, right, and reasonable in a political context.

Fourth, the media excludes alternative perspectives. Opinions that are considered not in line with the dominant narrative often take up less space or even receive no representation at all.

Fifth, the media normalizes ideological perspectives through the use of terms, symbols, and visual representations that are constantly repeated in public spaces.

These practices form what Foucault called a *regime of truth*, which is a social system that determines which knowledge is considered valid, rational, and acceptable in society. Truth in this perspective is not simply the result of scientific objectivity, but the result of social, institutional, and discursive practices that work continuously.

In political communication, *the regime of truth* can be seen when certain narratives regarding democracy, nationalism, development, security, or political identity are accepted as collective truth without always being questioned. The media plays a central role in the process through repetitive symbolic reproduction.

Digital Media and Power Mechanism Transformation

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the mechanism of production of political discourse. If in the era of conventional media power works a lot through editorial institutions, media organizations, and ownership structures, in the digital age power is increasingly integrated with technological systems, algorithms, and platform infrastructure.

Media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and others not only provide a communication space, but also determine the visibility of information through recommendation systems, content personalization, user behavior analysis, and attention optimization. The political information that appears in a user's timeline is no longer the result of editorial selection alone, but the result of algorithmic calculations that consider interaction patterns, user preferences, duration of consumption, and potential engagement.

A research study from Tarleton Gillespie shows that the platform's algorithms have functioned as *algorithmic gatekeepers*, which are systems that automatically determine which information gets public attention. This creates new forms of power relations that are not always directly visible, but work through code, data, and digital infrastructure. (Gillespie, 2024)

In a Foucauldian perspective, these conditions can be understood through the concept of *governmentality*. Governmentality refers to the way power works by regulating individual behavior through management techniques that appear rational, efficient, and participatory. In the digital ecosystem, governmentality works through information personalization, notifications, content recommendations, algorithmic moderation, and user engagement measurement systems.

Thus, power in digital media is no longer only present through the state, political parties, or media organizations, but also through technological systems that subtly direct public political behavior. Individuals feel free to choose information, even though those choices have been shaped by digital architectures that govern the possibility of interaction.

Discursive Resistance and Counter-Narrative

Although the media has a role as an apparatus for the production of the regime of truth, Foucault's thought also emphasizes that power relations are not absolute and closed. In the concept where there is power, there is always resistance, in principle this has important implications for understanding the dynamics of media political discourse, that the dominant narrative produced by the media always faces the possibility of being challenged, subverted, and countered through alternative discursive practices.

In the context of digital media, the space for resistance is increasingly open through the presence of platforms that provide access to the production and distribution of information to non-institutional actors, such as ordinary citizens, activists, independent journalists, marginalized communities, and social movements. This study shows that this kind of counter-narrative has the potential to disrupt the stability of established truth regimes, open up space, and encourage an inclusive public deliberation process. However, discursive resistance in the digital age also faces significant structural challenges, because the platform's algorithmic mechanisms tend to limit the reach of content that is considered quite controversial or incompatible with the logic of engagement, so that counter-narratives are often trapped in an ideologically aligned user environment without being able to reach a wider audience.

The Formation of Political Subjectivity

One of the important aspects of Michel Foucault's thought is the concept of subjectivity, which is the process of forming individual identity through power relations and discursive practices. In the context of political communication, the media has an important role in shaping the political subjectivity of society.

Repeated exposure to certain political narratives can shape the way individuals understand democracy, leadership, nationalism, freedom, and political participation. Individuals do not simply receive information, but build political identities through constant interaction with the symbols, language, visual representations, and discursive communities available in the media.

In digital media, the process of subjectivation takes place more intensively because users are not only consumers of information, but also producers, distributors, and amplifiers of political discourse. Activities such as liking, sharing content, writing comments, following political accounts, or joining digital communities are practices that gradually shape users' political identities.

Nick Couldry's study shows that modern media plays an important role in the formation of social reality and collective identity. In the political context, digital media shapes citizens not only as audiences, but as political subjects that continue to be produced through digital interaction.

Thus, political subjectivity is not formed naturally, but is the result of repeated interactions with discourses produced and reproduced by the media. This process shows that the media has a central role in the reproduction of power at the individual and collective levels.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that media political discourse in the digital era operates as a complex discursive apparatus that actively constructs political reality rather than merely reflecting it. Through a Foucauldian lens, the relationship between power and knowledge is evident in how media institutions and digital platforms shape regimes of truth through processes of selection, framing, repetition, and exclusion of information. These mechanisms determine which political narratives are legitimized, which actors gain visibility, and how public understanding of political issues is structured. Furthermore, the transformation of media into algorithm-driven digital platforms intensifies this dynamic, as visibility and meaning are increasingly governed by datafication, personalization systems, and platform infrastructure. As a result, political subjectivity is continuously produced and reproduced through mediated interactions, positioning individuals not only as audiences but also as active participants within a structured system of discursive power relations.

For future research, it is recommended that studies move beyond purely conceptual and narrative synthesis toward empirical validation of Foucauldian frameworks in digital political communication contexts. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches could be used to examine how algorithmic systems concretely influence the formation of political opinion, polarization, and truth regimes across different platforms and socio-political contexts. Future studies should also explore comparative analyses between traditional media and algorithmic media environments to better understand shifts in power structures. In addition, research focusing on user-level experiences of subjectivity formation and resistance practices in digital spaces would further enrich the theoretical contribution by connecting macro-level discourse analysis with micro-level behavioral data, thereby strengthening the applicability of Foucauldian theory in contemporary media studies.

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