

Communicating Digital Creative Labour under Algorithmic Governance in Platform Economies

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Abstract

Purpose: On platforms like TikTok and Instagram, a creator's livelihood depends entirely on being seen. This study investigates how platform algorithms restrict digital creators through official corporate rules. We explore how tech companies use institutional communications to exert structural and symbolic power over digital content creators.

Methods: Using critical discourse analysis, we examined official platform rulebooks, including algorithm policies, community guidelines, and moderation manuals. By analyzing the specific language within these documents, we traced how corporate wording subtly dictates the power balance between platforms and creators.

Findings: Platforms strategically use passive voice, moral framing, and dense technical jargon to obscure authority while steering creator behavior. By framing visibility as both a reward and a constant risk, platforms force creators into internalized surveillance. Creators consequently mold their content and personalities to fit underlying algorithmic logic.

Originality: Previous research often treats algorithms as opaque technical black boxes, frequently and completely overlooking the institutional texts mediating this control. This study fills that gap by introducing linguistic algorithmic governmentality. We demonstrate that platform guidelines are disciplinary technologies translating cold code into behavioral norms. Theoretically, this extends Foucaultian governmentality and the critical political economy of communication into the platform era. It proves digital power is enforced through strategic corporate language, reshaping how we understand digital subjectivity and creative labor governance within contemporary digital media ecosystems.

Keywords: Algorithmic Infrastructure, Governmentality, Institutional Communication, Platform Economy, Digital Labor.

Introduction

The global economy has experienced a deep transformation over the last ten years, primarily fueled by the rise and dominance of the economy of digital platforms. This transition reflects more than just alterations in how people create and consume digital media because it also reveals profound structural changes in societal and economic connections, especially regarding labour and production (Purcell & Brook, 2022). Applications such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have grown far beyond their original purposes as mere venues for entertainment and personal expression. They have transformed into intricate economic ecosystems that dictate how individuals work and socialize while building their digital identities (Yasih, 2023). These specific platforms are no longer simple outlets for amusement or personal expression but have become novel economic frameworks that influence how users operate and connect while shaping their sense of self (Zanoni & Miszczyński, 2024). The choice to focus on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram as research subjects stems from the scientific rationale that these three

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applications are dominant entities within a platform economy heavily molded by algorithmic systems. These applications significantly dictate how digital creative labour is mediated, commodified, and positioned through the underlying logic of visibility, monetization, and algorithmic performativity. Each platform employs distinct algorithmic mechanisms, such as the recommendation system of TikTok, the feed driven by engagement on Instagram, and the multilayered monetization and recommendation architecture of YouTube. This variation enables a comparative analysis of how algorithmic governance operates differently across these applications while still shaping similar patterns of creative labour. Furthermore, these platforms serve as primary sites where creative workers negotiate their labour identities, productivity, and agency, making them empirically rich arenas for understanding how digital creative labour is communicated within increasingly algorithmically structured regimes. This marks a significant transition from an industrial work model toward one based on performativity, affect, and digital engagement.

The digital economy of platforms has generated new forms of labour that depend not only on individual creative capacity but are also profoundly shaped by opaque and constantly evolving algorithms. Within this environment, the logic of labour is no longer dictated by formal contracts, fixed schedules, or hierarchical organizational frameworks. Instead, it is governed by digital performance metrics including view counts, user interactions, and engagement rates (Dammann et al., 2022). This dynamic creates a distinct pressure for creators to maintain constant visibility to remain relevant within a highly competitive and volatile digital landscape. Visibility in this setting is not simply a byproduct of creative labour. It has transformed into the labour itself, meaning every action, gesture, or narrative shared on these platforms can be converted into popularity, professional opportunities, or financial gain (Guerra & d'Andréa, 2023). Consequently, digital creative labour cannot be understood in isolation from the mechanisms of power that operate subtly yet effectively through platform infrastructures. Power within the platform economy is no longer repressive in the traditional sense. Instead, it operates through the regulation of norms, standards, and algorithms that shape how creators think, feel, and behave (Pellandini-Simányi, 2024). This is precisely where the concept of governmentality proposed by Michel Foucault becomes highly relevant. Governmentality describes the methods through which modern power functions via techniques of internal regulation that are adopted by individuals. Rather than relying on coercion, power functions by producing individuals who willingly regulate themselves according to norms embedded within specific institutions, practices, and cultural representations (Bratich et al., 2003).

Empirical data reveals striking patterns where an analysis of one million Instagram accounts indicates that merely 1.4% percent of aspiring creators succeed in exceeding 5000 followers despite intensive engagement efforts. This statistic highlights the strict algorithmic gatekeeping that dictates content visibility. A particularly notable finding is the ideological homogenization among top influencers because 87 percent consistently promote conservative narratives, which serves as clear evidence of how platform algorithms institutionalize specific forms of conformity. Meanwhile, 54 percent of microentrepreneurs operate without verified business accounts, which renders their economic activities invisible to the formal systems of the platform and consequently excludes them from business protections and features (University College Dublin, 2023).

Within the platform economy, governmentality manifests through algorithms that mediate and shape the relationships among creators, content, and audiences. These

algorithms not only determine who sees specific material but also define which types of content are deemed worthy or valuable (Gardezi & Stock, 2021). Through this process, the creative subject is formed as an individual who constantly adapts to system logic, pursues engagement, and internalizes success standards dictated by performance metrics (Petersmann & Van Den Meerssche, 2024). In other words, creators become agents of internal regulation driven by the logic of visibility, meaning every aspect of their existence ranging from lifestyle and aesthetics to ideological views must align with algorithmic expectations to maintain their digital presence (Cobbe, 2021; Maalsen, 2023). However, this form of power is not always overt. On the contrary, power in this context operates through what appears to be freedom, specifically the freedom to express, create, and share. It is precisely within this claimed freedom that power operates most effectively because subjects perceive their actions and choices as autonomous, while in reality, these choices are conditioned by the systemic logics embedded within the platform itself (Henin & Le Métayer, 2022). This contradiction renders digital visibility a complex political terrain where subjects do not merely work for themselves but also, often unknowingly, reproduce the very system that governs and constrains their range of action (Matzner, 2024).

To comprehend these dynamics more fully, this study utilizes discourse analysis as its main methodological approach. This method allows for an exploration of how language, narratives, and representations are utilized to build and maintain power structures (Canning & Walker, 2024). Within this context, the analysis does not merely focus on content produced by creators but also examines platform policy documents, community guidelines, user interface designs, and the algorithms governing information circulation (Maalsen, 2023; Newlands, 2021). All these elements function as interconnected discursive forms that collectively shape the meaning frameworks guiding social action in digital environments. For instance, the narrative of authenticity is frequently invoked by both platforms and creator communities as a core value. Upon closer examination, however, the authenticity being promoted is a commodified and algorithmically aligned version rather than the freedom to express their true self (Purcell & Brook, 2022). This narrative places pressure on creators to portray a highly planned yet seemingly natural self. Similarly, narratives surrounding passion and hustle culture push individuals to exert endless effort in the pursuit of success and fame, frequently at the expense of their mental wellbeing, emotional stability, or economic justice (Pellandini-Simányi, 2024).

Furthermore, this study investigates how recommendation systems and user interface design function as discursive tools that shape user behavior. Beyond serving as mere communication features, interactive buttons for liking, sharing, and commenting act as essential components of a continuous surveillance system that tracks and directs creator actions (Cobbe, 2021). The platform captures and processes every user interaction to generate behavioral predictions that ultimately control content exposure. Within this framework, creators become integrated into an advanced data production mechanism where their labor generates metrics and information that hold economic value for the platform alongside the actual content. Consequently, it is crucial to recognize that visibility results from highly specific power configurations and is neither neutral nor objective (Cobbe, 2021). Digital visibility operates as a selective mechanism determining who is deemed worthy of public attention and who remains excluded from the digital spotlight. This dynamic carries profound ethical and political implications, especially regarding unequal access, representation, and economic opportunity. When algorithms

favor specific physical appearances, speech patterns, or social backgrounds, they reproduce inequality within a digital format that appears neutral but is actually deeply biased (Maalsen, 2023; Pellandini-Simányi, 2024).

Consequently, this research aims not only to reveal the technical operations of algorithmic systems or the prevailing narratives within creator communities but also to emphasize the affective and existential aspects of digital creative work. The creative individual does not simply labor for the platform but experiences deep identity shifts due to their interaction with the system. Personal identity transforms into an element that requires continuous curation, adjustment, and optimization to satisfy audience expectations and platform logic (Törnberg, 2023; Villet, 2022). Under these circumstances, creative work becomes pervasive as it consumes time, energy, attention, and even the personal intimacy of the individual. Therefore, this study establishes visibility as a core analytical category that allows for a rereading of power dynamics within the digital economy. Visibility is not merely about the visible content itself but rather concerns how that content is shaped, distributed, and given meaning. It represents a form of power that functions through aesthetics, affect, and algorithms, which is a combination that transforms the digital sphere into a subtle yet highly effective ideological battleground (Henin & Le Métayer, 2022; Purcell & Brook, 2022).

Additionally, digital visibility in creative work must be comprehended within the context of time and continuous performance. Achieving viral status or single recognition is insufficient because a digital presence requires sustained and ongoing performance. Consequently, creative work transforms into a perpetual endeavor where leisure time, personal privacy, and resting periods are utilized as productive intervals (Pellandini-Simányi, 2024). Every element of daily existence ranging from morning routines to personal sorrow can be converted into content and evaluated based on its potential to be viewed and distributed. This dynamic illustrates how digital creative work progressively erases the boundaries separating public and private spheres as well as professional and personal life. Examined through this perspective, it becomes clear that creative work within the platform economy is inseparable from the logic of affective and neoliberal capitalism, which prioritizes individual productivity, extreme flexibility, and expectations of self governance (Purcell & Brook, 2022). Digital platforms act as environments where neoliberal ideals of self entrepreneurship are extensively replicated through narratives focusing on success, motivation, and self development (Ricaurte et al., 2024). Digital creators are urged to act as chief executives of their own lives, managing their time, energy, public image, and even personal trauma as assets to be traded within the attention economy. Utilizing the framework of governmentality and the methodology of discourse analysis, this article aims to provide both theoretical and empirical contributions to the existing literature concerning creative work, platform economies, and power dynamics in digital societies. By demonstrating how creative individuals are molded by an invisible yet highly prescriptive system logic, this research broadens our comprehension of how power functions in the advanced technology era. It also attempts to create space for critical reflection regarding the values we maintain when evaluating work, productivity, and success in a society increasingly controlled by visibility and algorithms.

Consequently, this research introduces a novel approach by combining critical discourse analysis, governmentality theory, and digital interface studies to examine how creative work is formed within platform environments controlled by algorithms. In contrast to earlier research that typically isolates technical algorithmic methods from cultural examinations of content makers, this investigation highlights the deep

connections between official policies, user interactions, and algorithmic features as a single cohesive discursive structure. Through the simultaneous examination of three primary platforms, specifically TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, this research demonstrates how the personal identity of creative professionals is molded by emotional and regulatory forces embedded within technological frameworks. This comprehensive method delivers fresh theoretical and methodological advancements to digital communication studies, especially in clarifying the complex interactions of work, visibility, and authority within the platform economy.

In conclusion, digital creative work operates as a highly debated political, ideological, and ethical domain requiring advanced and multidisciplinary analytical methods, functioning simultaneously as a novel economic activity. Within the platform era, the creative individual acts not merely as a producer of content but also as an object and agent of power operating through systems of visibility. To prevent relying on technological or economic assumptions that conceal the fundamental power dynamics operating behind our screens, it is essential to continuously generate critical research examining these phenomena. Consequently, this research serves as a critical intervention regarding our understanding of freedom, work, and existence in a world deeply influenced by algorithmic technologies and neoliberal logic, alongside being an academic effort to grasp the complexity of digital creative labour (Maalsen, 2023). This investigation offers an alternative perspective on how we might understand and ultimately reimagine the forms of work and life in the digital age by reinterpreting governmentality and the discourse surrounding visibility. More specifically, this research intends to describe and examine how digital platforms regulate, mold, and communicate creative work through algorithmic frameworks and discursive practices. The primary focus is directed toward the relationship among official platform policies, the lived experiences of creators, and digital affordances in building narratives concerning productivity, the value of work, and creative identity.

Methods

This research utilizes discourse analysis to explore how language within algorithmic platforms shapes digital creative labour. It emphasizes the role of discourse in molding power, surveillance, and subjectivity, aligning with the concept of governmentality proposed by Michel Foucault, where regulation functions through normalization and internal discipline (Bratich et al., 2003; Canning & Walker, 2024). The discourse analysis for this research unfolds across four stages. The initial phase involves identifying discourse units by selecting relevant texts and segments, including captions, comments, biographies, official platform documents, and user responses. The second stage applies a linguistic examination to evaluate lexical choices, syntactic structures, modality, metaphors, and textual coherence, focusing on how the self, labour, and power are represented. The third phase investigates the context of production and circulation by exploring the content creators, the social and digital conditions surrounding their publication, and the audience reception. The final stage employs a critical ideological interpretation to link these linguistic forms with underlying belief systems, particularly the subtle operations of algorithmic governmentality. This concluding phase emphasizes that digital creative labour is molded not just by language use, but also by the algorithmic control embedded within platform infrastructures.

Building on these methodological stages, the subsequent section applies this framework by examining official policy documents from TikTok, YouTube, and

Instagram. The chosen materials encompass the Community Guidelines and FYF Policy of TikTok, its Account level Sanctions, the Recommendation and Moderation Policy of YouTube, and the Algorithm Explanation for Feed, Stories, and Reels on Instagram. These documents were selected because they serve as primary regulatory texts through which each platform defines visibility, enforces behavioral norms, and governs creator conduct. The formal and prescriptive nature of their language makes them highly suitable for discourse analysis to reveal how algorithmic authority functions through these institutional communication channels across the global digital landscape today and shapes modern digital economies.

Table 1. Institutional Guidelines and Discursive Construction of Visibility

Type of Guideline	Excerpt (Original)	Linguistic Features	Discursive Interpretation
TikTok: Community Guidelines & FYF Policy	<i>“The FYF is ... intended for a range of audiences ... We make content created by anyone under 16 ineligible for the For You Feed ...”</i>	Age modal (“under 16”), passive voice (“ineligible”)	Visibility is normatively regulated; under-16 creators are systemically excluded--self-discipline embedded through age thresholds.
TikTok: Community Guidelines (Account-level sanctions)	<i>“Accounts ... may be temporarily restricted from posting new content ... temporarily ineligible to appear in the FYF...”</i>	Passive/modal (“may be restricted”), technical register	Enforces algorithmic discipline via threats of invisibility; presence in FYF becomes instrument of behavioural compliance.
YouTube: Recommendation & Moderation Policy	<i>“We built classifiers ... prevent racy or violent content from being recommended ... demote ‘borderline’ misinformation.”</i>	Technical lexicon (“classifiers”, “demote”), moral framing	Positions platform as ethical gatekeeper; demotion normalizes invisibility of non-approved content.
Instagram: Algorithm Explanation (Feed, Stories, Reels)	<i>“We use a variety of algorithms, classifiers ... Feed, Stories, Explore, Reels ... factors: likes, comments, watch time ...”</i>	Quantitative framing (“variety”, “factors”), enumerative lists	Visibility becomes outcome of measured performance; creators encouraged to self-manage output against algorithmic metrics.

Note: This table presents official platform guidelines analyzed as discursive texts. No statistical data used. Linguistic features are interpreted to uncover visibility norms and algorithmic control mechanisms.

Table 1 outlines the social media applications investigated in this research, specifically TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, together with the institutional guidelines acting as primary sources of discursive data. These applications were selected based on scientific and contextual rationales because they constitute the most dominant and influential environments within the contemporary landscape of digital creative labour.

Academic and industry investigations consistently demonstrate that these platforms host some of the largest active user communities and possess highly advanced algorithmic systems regulating content visibility, creator behaviour, and monetisation frameworks. TikTok is recognised for its algorithm driven For You Page which dictates content virality and creator reach. YouTube operates as a well established space for professional content creation, featuring monetisation structures and community guidelines reflecting strong institutional control. Instagram, utilising its combination of visual feeds, stories, and reels, offers a hybrid model of curated content blending personal branding with algorithmic curation. These three platforms were chosen because they represent distinct yet overlapping modalities of creative labour, making them ideal for a comparative discourse analysis of platform policy language and visibility logic. Furthermore, their global influence and relevance to creative communities render them critical sites for studying how algorithmic governmentality shapes digital subjectivities. The analysis reveals that platform discourse functions not merely as a means of communication but also as an ideological mechanism guiding behaviour through linguistic strategies such as modality, technical vocabulary, evaluative framing, and metric based justification. These elements contribute to the normalisation of internal regulation among creators and construct visibility as a conditional and performative outcome.

Results

The study's conclusions show that institutional language ingrained in the rules, regulations, and official narratives of digital platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram systematically shapes visibility in digital creative labor, which is not just the outcome of content performance or audience interaction. Discourse analysis of official documents from these three platforms revealed that algorithmic power functions by regulating meaning, normalizing standards, and establishing circumstances where creators voluntarily discipline themselves to stay visible and relevant--rather than by enacting explicit prohibitions (Villet, 2022).

TikTok's phrase, *"accounts may be temporarily restricted from appearing in the For You feed,"* demonstrates the consistent linguistic pattern with uncertain modalities and passive sentence structures found in the algorithmic policies examined. Such constructions obscure the agency of the enforcer and create the impression that invisibility is a systemic, automated risk (Matzner, 2024). Within Foucault's framework of governmentality, this reflects a form of modern power that no longer operates repressively, but through self-governing techniques. Power is no longer exercised through prohibition or coercion, but through conditions that prompt individuals to actively conform to system-imposed norms (Harkens, 2018).

Visibility constitutes one of the primary arenas of power within digital platforms. Platforms construct visibility as a form of performance measured through quantitative metrics such as likes, watch time, and engagement rate, as reflected in Instagram's policy document which states: *"we use a variety of algorithms... taking into account likes, comments, and watch time."* Such language implies that visibility is the outcome of a specific, calculable formula that can be optimised. However, in practice, this formula is never fully transparent or disclosed, leading creators to operate in a state of uncertainty that, paradoxically, reinforces self-discipline. From a governmentality perspective, power within the platform ecosystem does not only govern outcomes (outputs), but also shapes how subjects think about themselves (Whitehead & Collier, 2023). Digital creators do not simply work to produce content; they also manage identity, emotion, and even personal

time as integral components of creative labour. They become entrepreneurs of the self--individuals expected to continuously regulate and optimise their lives to align with market logic and algorithmic visibility systems (Törnberg, 2023). Power operates through the imperative to 'be oneself,' but only within boundaries implicitly established by the platform--boundaries articulated through narratives of authenticity, passion, and community standards (Bucher et al., 2021).

The analysis of YouTube's policy documents also reveals how the algorithmic system is positioned as a guardian of digital morality. Statements such as "*we demote borderline misinformation*" employ ethical strategies to legitimise content filtering and suppression decisions. By framing algorithms as protectors against harmful content, the platform implicitly constructs a value hierarchy regarding which types of content are deemed suitable for public visibility. As a result, creators are compelled to avoid 'risky' topics--even those with significant social relevance--in order to minimise the possibility of demotion or reduced exposure. In this situation, governmentality takes on a very subtle form: affective and existential pressures, rather than overt coercion or explicit prohibition, push creators to constantly decipher the system's signals (Harkens, 2018). They become both objects and agents of a power that functions through metrics and algorithms, which are seemingly neutral but are actually infused with platform-driven economic interests and ideological bias. In addition to losing audiences, creators who don't keep up with this pace also miss out on the economic opportunities that are currently centered around digital visibility (Pignot, 2023).

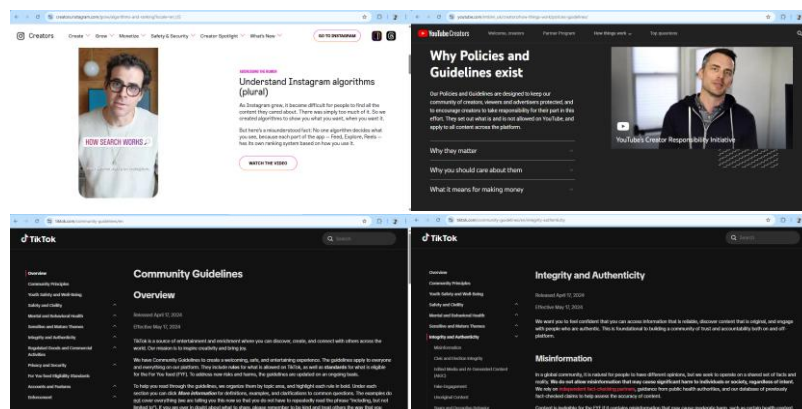


Figure 1. Strategic communication styles across platforms: Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok (FYF = For You Feed; IG = Instagram Guidelines; YT = YouTube Terms) (source: Instagram Creators, YouTube Creators, TikTok Community Guidelines, 2025)

Figure 1 illustrates communication styles used by Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to regulate creator visibility. Instagram relies on quantified engagement indicators, YouTube emphasizes technical moderation and moral classification, while TikTok applies eligibility rules and account restrictions through passive language. These patterns show that platform communication does not merely inform creators about policies. It also directs adaptation, encourages self regulation, and reinforces algorithmic authority by making visibility conditional upon compliance with specific platform standards and performance expectations.

The results also show that platforms' language serves as a mechanism for creating meaning and constructing social reality rather than just being a means of communicating rules. Words like 'demoted,' 'restricted,' and 'ineligible' have both normative and technical connotations. Not all content is worthy of being shown, and creators have to

adapt--not for fear of punishment, but rather for fear of being forgotten in the digital world (Harkens, 2018). In other words, they operate within regimes of self-discipline shaped by institutional language and algorithmic systems, which directly reflect the essence of governmentality as articulated by Foucault: a form of power that shapes subjects to comply without needing to be coerced (Villet, 2022).

Table 2. Comprehensive Summary of Research Findings

Type of Institutional Discourse Analyzed	Main Communication Policies	Observed Creator Communication Patterns	Implication on Digital Communication
TikTok: Community Guidelines, FYF (For You Feed) Policy, Account-Level Sanctions	Emphasis on safety, authenticity, inclusion; enforcement via content moderation & account penalties.	Creators adjust content to match "For You" algorithm logic; avoid controversial themes; prefer trending audio & formats. Creators use advertiser-safe language; avoid flagged keywords; format content for algorithmic boost (e.g., thumbnails, retention rate). Creators prioritize aesthetics and positive tone; avoid sensitive or complex issues; design captions and visuals for algorithmic favor.	Communication shaped by opaque recommendation systems; self-regulation is driven by engagement metrics.
YouTube: Recommendation and Moderation Policy	Focus on community safety, advertiser-friendly content, AI-supported moderation.		Creators negotiate between visibility and monetization; communication adapted to platform's advertising logic.
Instagram: Algorithm Explanation (Feed, Stories, Reels)	Encourages positive content, visual engagement, community standards enforcement.		Platform prioritizes engagement; emotional tone becomes part of communication strategy.

Note: This table presents official platform guidelines analyzed as discursive texts. No statistical data were used. Linguistic features and narrative structures are interpreted to uncover visibility norms and algorithmic control mechanisms embedded in platform communication policies.

Table 2 summarizes how institutional policies across TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram shape creator communication practices and their implications. TikTok encourages conformity to recommendation trends, YouTube promotes advertiser friendly language and retention strategies, while Instagram prioritizes visual appeal and positive

emotional expression. Across all platforms, creators continually adjust topics, wording, formats, and presentation styles to secure visibility. The table therefore demonstrates that digital communication emerges through negotiation between personal expression, platform rules, engagement metrics, and monetization demands.

These findings indicate that digital communication carried out by creators on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram does not occur freely, but is heavily influenced by algorithmic logic and platform policies. In this context, communication is not merely the exchange of messages between users, but a strategic interaction between creators and technological systems that determine content visibility. Creators shape their messages, choose their language, construct narratives, and manage emotional expressions based on patterns perceived to align with algorithmic preferences, rather than purely personal expression. Strategies such as using neutral language, light narratives, and visually appealing formats serve as forms of adaptation to standards that are not always transparent. On the other hand, platforms communicate their policies through normative narratives that promote values such as safety and inclusivity, but these often remain ambiguous and shift the burden of interpretation and adjustment onto creators. In this condition, digital communication becomes a complex process of negotiation--between personal expression, audience expectations, and calculated anticipation of how the system will respond. Communication thus shifts from merely conveying meaning to a continuous effort to sustain one's presence in a digital ecosystem governed more by technological design than by social interaction.

Furthermore, this study finds that the pressure of visibility produces a form of ambivalence in creators' experiences. On one hand, creators feel empowered by the ability to express themselves and earn income from their work. On the other hand, they experience emotional and mental exhaustion from the constant need to appear, monitor analytics, and maintain digital performance. Creative labour becomes never-ending, as today's success offers no guarantee of tomorrow's existence. Each day becomes a struggle to remain visible--to remain present. Within the logic of governmentality, this reveals that control no longer operates externally, but is embedded in the subject's everyday experience--through stress, performance expectations, and affective pressures to remain a part of the system ([Charitsis et al., 2025](#)).

By synthesising these findings, it becomes evident that algorithmic power within digital platforms represents an advanced form of governing the self. It works by fostering an environment where people govern themselves in accordance with highly prescriptive but never explicitly stated norms. These platforms serve as architects of social and cultural life in addition to offering digital infrastructure. They influence our perceptions of identity, freedom, and success ([Zou, 2021](#)). Visibility in this context is not just a status or a number; rather, it is a key tool of control in digital society, a type of power that functions through affect, calculation, and aesthetics. Overall, the results show that digital creative labor under platform algorithmic logic is a very complicated process that is heavily influenced by ideology. In addition to creating content, creators participate in a system of value distribution, data production, and the perpetuation of neoliberal standards for success, authenticity, and productivity ([Khader, 2022](#)). In this ecosystem, governmentality now functions primarily through digital platforms that subtly influence both our subjective lives and structural realities, rather than through more conventional institutions like the state or education.

Thus, this study offers an empirical account of how algorithms and platform language function, advancing a critical examination of power in the digital age. As

societies become increasingly shaped by code, algorithmic infrastructures, and platform governance, it becomes crucial to understand how visibility systems are constructed and creative subjectivities managed within digital architectures. This understanding is not merely technical; it invites broader existential, ethical, and political reflection on freedom, creativity, and labor in a world mediated by opaque algorithmic processes (Hägg et al., 2025). By revealing the underlying logics that shape who gets seen, heard, and valued in digital spaces, this study sets the stage for further inquiry into how individuals might resist, subvert, or reconfigure these systems toward more equitable and autonomous digital futures.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to explore how digital creative labour is discursively constructed within the algorithmic environments managed by digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Findings from a comprehensive analysis of the institutional documents produced by each platform reveal that digital visibility stems from highly complex discursive arrangements instead of an arbitrary or natural occurrence (Whitehead & Collier, 2023). This illustrates how power within the digital realm is expressed through processes of normalization and internal regulation rather than through direct coercion. Initially, the findings indicate that these platforms portray themselves as neutral entities merely providing the technology required to distribute content. However, the language embedded within their policies makes it evident that they simultaneously function as norm setters and regulators of behavior. Passive sentence structures, technical vocabulary, and narratives concerning morality and community safety collectively contribute to building a value system that creators internalize. Instead of issuing explicit prohibitions, platforms articulate potential sanctions such as restricted visibility, removal from recommendation algorithms, or reduced exposure through euphemistic language suggesting that content might not be displayed (Newlands, 2021).

Within this environment, power functions in a concealed yet highly influential manner. Content makers lack precise knowledge of algorithmic operations, but they deduce mechanics by observing distribution and exposure patterns from their earlier uploads. By analyzing these trends, they formulate strategies to adjust their material so they stay aligned with the dominant algorithmic currents. This dynamic creates an ongoing cycle of internal regulation where individuals willingly alter their style, topics, or expressive methods to match platform expectations that remain largely unspoken and opaque (De Ruvo, 2025). The subsequent table 3 provides a detailed examination of this phenomenon by comparing the primary discursive frameworks identified within the policy documents of the three selected platforms:

Table 3. Discursive Structure Regulating Digital Creators' Visibility

Platform	Institutional language	Linguistic Feature	Effect on Creator
TikTok	<i>"Accounts may be temporarily ineligible to appear in FYF"</i>	Modality, passive voice	Uncertainty, triggers self-regulation.
YouTube	<i>"We demote borderline content ..."</i>	Ethical framing, technicality	Content is filtered based on the platform's moral values.
Instagram	<i>"We use various factors</i>	Enumerative,	Creators are directed

<i>... likes, watch time, comments ...”</i>	quantitative	to optimize performance metrics.
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Note: Platform language shapes norms of visibility and creator self-discipline through technical sentences that appear neutral yet carry strong normative meaning.

[Table 3](#) demonstrates that all examined platforms consistently utilize language designed to foster ambiguity and evade direct accountability. Content creators are rarely explicitly warned about punitive measures. Instead, they encounter an opaque system lacking in transparency where uncertainty itself serves as a highly effective tool for behavioral control. Within this structure, digital visibility is not an inherent right but rather a conditional reward that platforms can grant or withdraw based on how closely creators adhere to established norms ([Cobbe, 2021](#)).

These findings indicate that the definition of digital creative labour has undergone a significant transformation. It is no longer solely about producing meaningful or aesthetically pleasing content. It also requires the ability to interpret algorithmic systems, adjust to platform expectations, and manage a digital persona in accordance with shifting trends ([Weiskopf & Hansen, 2023](#)). Within this environment, success relies not just on the intrinsic value or originality of the material, but equally on how effectively it satisfies a constantly evolving set of standards dictated by the platforms. Creators do not merely generate videos, images, or written texts. They also construct identities, emotional expressions, and lifestyles that conform to system demands, frequently organizing their personal presentation with a strategic understanding of platform logic and audience metrics.

At this stage, pressure originates not only from external sources like algorithms, audiences, and engagement metrics, but also from within the creators themselves, who internalize these expectations as personal standards. Many acknowledge that surviving in the digital ecosystem requires maintaining consistency in visual presentation, narrative style, and production schedules, even when this demands significant emotional and mental labour. The consequence is a persistent state of internal monitoring and affective regulation that leads to emotional fatigue, psychological stress, and identity crises, as individuals are compelled to continuously perform a polished and optimized version of themselves. This illustrates that visibility labour is not merely content production, but rather a form of total labour that reaches deeply into the existential dimensions of the self, blurring the boundaries between work and life as well as authenticity and performance ([Newlands, 2021](#)).

In contrast to previous studies that have emphasized the economic or technical aspects of algorithms, this research contributes by highlighting how platform policies and language play a central role in shaping new social norms. Platforms serve as regulatory organizations that establish what is valuable, what is acceptable, and what should be avoided, functioning as much more than mere tools for communication or distribution ([Bucher et al., 2021](#)). They operate as moral institutions in this manner, albeit through highly individualized and digitalized mechanisms. This dynamic also highlights the inherent contradictions built into the system of visibility. On the one hand, platforms encourage individuals to be authentic, unique, and creative. On the other hand, algorithmic systems and content distribution guidelines reduce that expressive space by imposing consistent performance standards. Even if their work holds substantial value, creators who deviate from algorithmic norms find it difficult to achieve widespread recognition. Within digital spaces frequently hailed as open and democratic, this reality calls into question the fairness, inclusivity, and diversity of the platform economy

(Kasapoglu et al., 2021).

The findings of this research are strongly supported by Scharlach et al. (2024) and Morales & Stecher (2023), who explain that within algorithmic environments, the most potent form of power remains invisible while successfully embedding the logic of performance evaluation into individual subjectivity. In the realm of digital creative labour, this power functions through metrics presented as objective measures of value, even though they are actually highly normative and dictated by the institutional preferences of the platform. Creators must not only produce content but also navigate these opaque systems, resulting in a phenomenon known as anticipatory compliance, which describes adherence to unwritten rules deduced from algorithmic patterns of reward and punishment (Hödl & Myrach, 2023; Zuboff, 2019). Research further indicates that algorithms do more than just execute technical censorship because they also regulate meaning and value through recommendation systems and the deliberate exclusion of visibility. Consequently, creators develop strategies based on speculative logic by continuously experimenting with content that might be accepted or promoted by the system (Annabell, 2025; Liang et al., 2025). In this context, algorithms operate not merely as technical instruments but as ideological actors that actively mold the norms of creative production and the social values associated with digital labour.

Furthermore, these discoveries can be situated within the framework of affective governance, which describes how emotions and feelings are integrated into the digital communication infrastructure that directs how individuals, particularly content creators, articulate themselves. Within this environment, communication is not merely viewed as the transfer of information but also encompasses how sentiments are exhibited and regulated to satisfy platform requirements. Content creators must continuously oversee not just their time and output but also their emotional displays, including enthusiasm, joy, or exhaustion, to stay relevant and attractive to the algorithmic systems (Liang et al., 2025; Zeng & Kaye, 2022). The interactions they build become highly performative, demanding that they project positivity to secure audience engagement, which ultimately creates substantial emotional strain. Digital applications have evolved into communication ecosystems that mold how individuals think, experience emotions, and articulate their thoughts. In this scenario, the concept of subjectivation proposed by Michel Foucault becomes highly applicable because communication is no longer dictated by explicit bans but rather by the implicit rules embedded within algorithmic frameworks that decide which messages receive visibility (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Salamon & Saunders, 2024). Consequently, the discourse surrounding communication on digital platforms does more than just control the substance of messages and narrative structures because it also molds how people express their identities and emotions, establishing digital communication as a domain of power that functions in a subtle yet highly effective manner (Cini, 2023; Duffy & Meisner, 2023).

Acknowledging the limitations of this research is essential. Primarily, the analysis relies exclusively on institutional documents and platform policies without incorporating the lived experiences or direct perspectives of digital content creators. Consequently, the voices of creative actors are filtered through the interpretation of textual materials rather than emerging from direct engagement, interviews, or immersive ethnographic observations. This inevitably constrains the depth of understanding regarding the affective, emotional, and strategic dimensions of platform labour (Lata et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Future research could address this gap by employing qualitative methods such as comprehensive interviews, case studies, or digital ethnography to gain richer and

more nuanced insights into how creators navigate algorithmic systems, negotiate platform constraints, and construct their identities in real time. Secondly, while the qualitative discourse approach is powerful in uncovering ideology and structures of meaning, it does not provide quantitative data on the extent to which institutional language impacts content distribution or engagement rates. Subsequent studies could integrate discourse analysis with algorithm audits or statistical analysis to explore the direct correlation between policy narratives and content distribution outcomes on platforms. Thirdly, it must be acknowledged that this study has yet to unpack the dynamics of visibility within specific geographical and cultural contexts. In reality, users of TikTok or YouTube in Indonesia may engage in content production and interaction practices that differ significantly from those in other nations due to distinct social, economic, and cultural factors.

Future investigations should therefore concentrate on local or regional dynamics to explore how global platform narratives are accepted, dismissed, or reimagined by user communities across diverse geographical regions. Language functions as much more than a mere medium for discussing regulations because it also serves as a mechanism to regulate behaviour, mould values, and construct frameworks of internal governance. Within the platform ecosystem, authority no longer moves in a strictly hierarchical manner. Instead, it moves laterally through the underlying logic of visibility, performance, and continuous individual refinement (Kalke, 2025). This research presents a compelling argument that digital creative labour within the platform economy is not merely an occupation or a method of personal expression but rather an arena where ideologies collide under symbolic, normative, and emotional pressures. Digital creators are not only shaped by algorithms but also actively internalise the logic of authority embedded within policy narratives that appear neutral yet are deeply invested with ideological and institutional interests. This represents the most subtle form of power, occurring when individuals believe they are acting freely while having already voluntarily aligned themselves with a system that moulds and monitors them from within.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that digital creative labour cannot be separated from the algorithmic power structures embedded within platform economies like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. Visibility is frequently assumed to stem purely from content quality, but it is actually generated through intricate discursive mechanisms involving institutional language, interface architecture, and algorithmic logic that subtly guide, filter, and discipline the actions of creators. By applying discourse analysis to platform policies, this investigation achieves its objective by revealing how these applications operate not just as neutral hosts but as influential institutions that govern creators both symbolically and structurally. Power functions through the concept of governmentality conceptualized by Michel Foucault, where creators willingly adapt to unwritten platform norms because of their internalized desire to stay visible and relevant. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to expanding governmentality into the digital realm by demonstrating how communication infrastructures built on platforms serve as locations for ideological regulation that mold subjectivities, values, and social behavior. Methodologically, the application of discourse analysis proves highly capable of exposing the concealed logic behind the apparently neutral narratives found in platform policies, thereby highlighting the importance of language, sentence construction, and symbolic representation as instruments of social control. These discoveries initiate crucial discussions regarding the emotional burden and existential pressures experienced by

creators who find themselves trapped in the necessity to continuously perform and optimize themselves to satisfy invisible algorithmic expectations. The implications of this investigation extend beyond academic theory by urging a critical awareness of how digital labour is managed and how visibility is distributed in an unequal manner. Future research is required to explore the lived experiences of creators through qualitative approaches like digital ethnography, comprehensive interviews, and participatory observation, alongside examining how platform norms are negotiated within specific cultural and regional contexts. Through this approach, the research not only expands the theoretical and methodological scope of digital communication studies but also contributes to envisioning more ethical, inclusive, and sustainable systems of digital creative labour in an era defined by algorithmic governance.

Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

Moch. Shobastian Mahendra Muchtar and Yuyun Agus Riani made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. Moch. Shobastian Mahendra Muchtar took primary responsibility for the data analysis, while both authors collaborated on the interpretation and discussion of the results. Yuyun Agus Riani supervised the research and provided critical academic guidance throughout the process. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organization related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

Generative AI Statement

The authors utilized Qwen and Publish or Perish to improve language, readability, and reference formatting during manuscript preparation. All outputs were thoroughly reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final content of this manuscript.

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