

Platform Capitalism, Social Media, and Hegemony: A Neo-Gramscian Perspective



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DAV Research Journal

Vol. 5 No. 2 @DAV RMC

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<https://doi.org/10.3126/davmj.v5i2.97491>

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Received: March 16, 2026
Revised: May 13, 2026
Accepted: June 22, 2026

Abstract

This study analyzes the interrelationships between digital platforms, social media, and contemporary power relations. The main objective of the study is to explain how platform capitalism plays a role in economic power, ideological hegemony, and social consensus building from a neo-Gramscian perspective. The research is qualitative in nature and is based entirely on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, theoretical materials, and in-depth critical reviews of existing research. The study suggests that digital platforms have evolved into institutions that not only serve as communication tools but also as institutions that construct new types of power structures through their control over data, algorithms, and digital infrastructure. While algorithmic governance and data ownership reinforce digital hegemony, social media also provide opportunities for alternative voices, social movements, and counter-hegemony. In conclusion, a combined neo-Gramscian analysis of economic, political, and cultural dimensions is necessary to understand the power relations of the digital age.

Keywords – Counter-hegemony, Digital hegemony, Neo-Gramscian theory, Platform capitalism

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How to cite this paper:

Magar, R. B. P. (2026). Platform capitalism, social media, and hegemony: A Neo-Gramscian perspective. *DAV Research Journal*, 5(2),77-90.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/davmj.v5i2.97491>

1. Introduction

Globalization, the rapid development of digital technology, and the information and communication revolution seem to have succeeded in bringing about widespread changes in the social, economic, and political structures of the 21st century. The expansion of the Internet and social media platforms has transformed the traditional processes of information production, distribution, and consumption. Digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, TikTok, Discord, and Google have developed not only as means of communication, but also as key structures of the global economy, political communication, public debate, civic participation, and public opinion formation (Van Dijck, 2020). By collecting, analyzing, and commercially utilizing a large amount of user data, these platforms have contributed to the development of a new type of digital economy, which Nick Srnicek has explained through the concept of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017). Under this system, data, algorithms, artificial intelligence, and digital networks have become the main means of production, while the digital activities of users themselves have transformed into the main source of economic value creation. In this way, digital platforms have created new structures of economic capital accumulation and have also redefined power, governance, and social relations, (Van Dijck, 2019; Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019).

The rise of platform capitalism, the nature of power and hegemony has also changed. Traditionally, economic power was considered to be related only to control over the physical means of production, while in the contemporary digital age, control over information, data, algorithms and communication infrastructure has emerged as a new basis for political and economic power. The concept of hegemony, propounded by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, is very useful and relevant to understand this change. According to Gramsci, any dominant class does not rule only through force or the repressive mechanisms of the state, but it establishes its ideology as social “common sense” through civil society, education, media, religion and cultural institutions and achieves public consent (Gramsci, 1971). With the expansion of digital platforms, social networks have made the process of building consensus, as Gramsci said, more effective, faster and invisible. Digital platforms have emerged as powerful vehicles for constructing modern ideological hegemony, as users’ thinking, behavior, and political opinions are influenced and perpetuated through algorithmic selection, personalized content recommendations, targeted advertising, and data-driven communication strategies, (Van Dijck, 2014; Fuchs, 2021).

In this context, the Neo-Gramscian perspective provides a powerful and necessary theoretical basis for a thorough analysis of platform capitalism, social networks, and power relations. Neo-Gramscian scholars such as Robert W. Cox and Stephen Gill have linked the relationship between power, the state, the market, and civil society to the historical development of global capitalism (Cox, 1982; Gill & Law, 1989). According to them, dominance is not simply the result of economic control, but is constructed through a combined process of political leadership, cultural influence, institutional arrangements, and ideological consensus. Applying this theoretical perspective to the digital age, multinational technology companies are seen to be creating a new kind of global power structure through their control over data, algorithms, digital infrastructure, and communication systems. Thus, platform capitalism has developed a new form of modern digital hegemony, merely generated economic benefits but also had a profound impact on public debate, democratic decision-making, and civic consciousness (Couldry & Mejias, 2018).

However, social media should not be understood solely as a means of maintaining dominance. These platforms have also created new opportunities for social movements, civil resistance, alternative media, and democratic participation. There are many examples of how social media has been used by the Arab Spring, the MeToo movement, Black Lives Matter, Enough to Enough, Anti-Corruption, the recent Gen-Z movement of Nepal, and various democratic movements to gain global support and public participation. On the other hand, these same platforms have also become major vehicle for misinformation, propaganda, hate speech, surveillance capitalism, algorithmic bias and political polarizations (Fuchs, 2021; Zuboff, 2019). Therefore, it is not enough to understand social media solely as a tool for democratic movement and liberation or as a mechanism of control. These platforms have evolved into a dynamic political arena of constant interaction between power, capital, ideology, and resistance, where processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony operate simultaneously (Cox, 1982; Gramsci, 1971).

Based on this theoretical and contemporary context, the present study aims to analyze the interrelationships between platform capitalism, social media, and ideological hegemony. Specifically, it explores the questions of how digital platforms reproduce economic and political power. What is the role of algorithms and data governance in building social consensus? And how are the possibilities for counter-hegemony developing in the digital public sphere? This study is expected to further enrich the debate on power, democracy, and governance in the digital age by establishing interdisciplinary connections between neo-Gramscian political economy, digital communication

studies, and contemporary political theory. In addition, it is believed that this study will make an important theoretical and policy contribution to understanding the relationship between social media, digital capitalism, and ideological hegemony in the context of developing democracies, especially Nepal.

2. Review of Literature

The concept of platform capitalism: A new form of the digital capitalism

The rapid development of digital technology, contemporary capitalism has taken on a new structural form, which various scholars have explained through the concept of platform capitalism. According to Srnicek (2017), platform capitalism is an economic system where digital platforms act as the basic infrastructure that mediates between markets, users, and producers. Under this, Facebook, Google, Amazon, Apple, and other large technology companies have developed a new type of capital accumulation system through data collection, network effects, algorithmic management, and the use of digital infrastructure. In this system, data is not just information or technical content, but has become a major source of economic value creation (Srnicek, 2017). Users' daily digital activities, search behavior, social relationships, and consumption trends are transformed into data products, which platform the companies use for advertising, predictive analysis, and market control (Zuboff, 2019).

Platform capitalism has gradually transformed the production system of traditional industrial capitalism into a new form based on digital infrastructure and information control. It has made ownership of data, algorithms, and networks, along with the means of production, the main basis of economic power. According to Van Dijck (2014), platforms have an extraordinary potential to restructure social relations, communication processes, and public life in a data-driven society. Digital platforms use users not only as consumers but also as active sources of data production, resulting in a new discourse on digital labor and the data economy (Fuchs, 2021). Platform capitalism has thus become a broader power structure that influences not only social behavior, cultural practices, and political relations. In addition, platform capitalism is characterized by the excessive influence and monopolistic tendencies of a few limited technology companies. Due to network effect, today large platforms dominate users and markets, creating unequal power relation in the digital economy (Srnicek, 2017). This raises new question about digital sovereignty, data rights, privacy and democratic control. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, the dominance of digital platform is not limited to economic control; it also has the potential to influence information, knowledge, and social consciousness.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and ideological power

This concept of hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci, is considered a very influential theoretical basis for the study of power relations. According to Gramsci (1971), the dominant class does not maintain its power solely through force or the repressive mechanism of the state. It makes its point of view socially acceptable through the institutions of civil society, culture, education, the media and ideology. Gramsci considered this process to be an effective tool for building consent. This view believes that power is not only concentrated in political institutions, but also in the cultural practices of everyday life and the process of social meaning-making. In Gramsci's view, hegemony is a dynamic process in which the dominant class creates a strong social value, norms and belief system to provide continued legitimacy to its leadership. Therefore, hegemony should not be understood simply as the control of the ruling class, but as a complex process of ideology production and reproduction at different levels of society (Gramsci, 1971).

According to Gramscian theory, media are important arenas for constructing ideological hegemony. Just as traditional media used to influence public opinion and social consciousness, social media platforms have expanded that role in the digital age. While social media have shown great potential to democratize the flow of information, they are also subject to algorithmic selection, commercial objectives, and data control (Fuchs, 2021). For this reason, digital platforms can also be understood as arenas of modern ideological struggle. Algorithmic structures determine which information is preferentially disseminated on digital platforms and which ideas are limited to low visibility. This establishes social media not only as a means of information exchange, but also as an important arena for ideology formation, social consensus generation, and political influence expansion (Jost et al., 2018).

The Gramscian perspective sees hegemony as a process of continuous constructions and challenge, rather than a static state. This further supports the analysis of how dominant ideologies are disseminated on digital platform and how alternative ideas generate resistance. Political discourses, propaganda, social movement and alternative campaigns on social media are examples of ongoing struggle between hegemony and counter-hegemony (Castells, 2012; Gramsci, 1971). The process of constructing counter-hegemony in the digital spheres has provided opportunity for marginalized group, civic campaigns, youth activism and social movements to present alternative political

voice. However, these resistance efforts are also influenced by the ownership structure, algorithmic control, and commercial priorities of the platform, making the relationship between digital hegemony and counter-hegemony complex and dialectical (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

Neo-Gramscian approach and digital power structure

Neo-Gramscian approach extends Gramsci's theory of hegemony to a broader field of study of contemporary world order, international political economy and global capitalism. Cox (1983) applies Gramscian concepts to international relations, explaining hegemony as the combined result of material capacity, ideology and institutional structure. According to him, no dominant system is sustained by the use of force alone. It is continuously reproduced by social consensus and institutional order. This approach helps to understand power relations not only in terms of state or military capacity but also in terms of the interrelationship of economic structures, social ideologies and institutional practices within them. In neo-Gramscian analysis, hegemony has developed as a historical process, in which dominant powers use both material and ideological means to legitimize their leadership. For this reason, technology, data and information control can also be studied as key tools for constructing new types of hegemony in the digital age (Cox, 1983).

Gill (1993) has further developed the neo-Gramscian perspective by analyzing the relationship between ideology, institutions, and economic structures in global capitalism. This perspective is particularly useful in the digital age, as technology companies have gained control not only over economic resources but also over information, knowledge, and communication systems. The power of digital platforms is built through their ownership of data, algorithmic decisions, and control over digital infrastructure. The dominance of technology companies in the digital economy has influenced not only the processes of production and consumption, but also the forms of social consciousness and political discourse. Digital power is not limited to economic control, as algorithms determine what content is visible, what information is prioritized, and which voices are silenced. Thus, control over data and digital infrastructure has emerged as a key strategic power source in modern political economy (Gill, 1993; Srnicek, 2017).

From this perspective, Google, Meta, Amazon, and other large digital companies have emerged as institutional structures of modern digital hegemony. They not only emphasize the market, but also play a significant role in the flow of information, public debate, and the formation of social perceptions (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Srnicek, 2017). Therefore, it cannot be denied that neo-Gramscian political economy has become a highly relevant theoretical tool in the study of digital platforms. The influence of these companies seems to extend not only to their economic size, but also to their ability to produce knowledge, build social relations and determine political priorities. These digital platforms are changing the structures of the public sphere, transforming civic dialogue and democratic processes into new form. Therefore, when studying digital hegemony, it is necessary to analyze technology not only as a neutral medium, but also as a social structure constructed through the interrelationships of power, ideology, and capital (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Fuchs, 2021).

The Social media, algorithms and digital dominance

Social media platforms have brought about a profound change in the nature of modern political communication and the public sphere. Castells (2012) has emphasized that information flows and social power relations are influenced by digital networks through the concept of a network society. Digital networks create new possibilities for citizen participation, social movements and political organization. In a network society, the control of information and communication plays a significant role in the distribution of social power. Therefore, digital platforms have emerged as a major arena for the construction of political influence. Social media has challenged the monopoly of traditional media, providing citizens with opportunities for direct expression and participation. At the same time, digital visibility, reach and influence have also been affected by the structural rules and technological management of the platform (Castells, 2012; Van Dijck, 2014).

But social media should not be considered as completely free and neutral communication spaces. Algorithms determine which content reaches users, which ideas are more visible and which voices are suppressed. According to Beer (2017), algorithms are not just technical processes; they are powerful means of social classification and the exercise of power. Power operates invisibly and effectively on digital platforms because algorithmic systems control the process of information selection and prioritization. The information users receive is not only their free choice, but is also guided by computational rules and commercial objectives developed by platform companies. This raises important theoretical questions about the possibility of fairness, transparency, and democratic dialogue on social media (Beer, 2016). Data collection and algorithmic control have given digital platforms the ability to influence and change user behavior. Couldry and Mejias (2019) have criticized the process by which digital companies transform various aspects of human life into data resources through the concept of data colonialism. This requires

understanding digital dominance not only as an economic but also as a cultural and political process. This process of data collection is not limited to market analysis and advertising strategies. It also influences the process of constructing individual identities, preferences, and social behavior. Digital platforms can use knowledge about user behavior as a source of power, extending their influence over social relations and political perceptions. From this perspective, digital dominance is not only about control over technology, but also about control over the ability to construct knowledge, information, and social reality in the digital age (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Zuboff, 2019).

Digital Counter-Hegemony and Social Movement

Gramscian theory recognizes the possibility of counter-hegemony alongside hegemony, according to Gramsci (1971), dominant ideology is never completely stable. Different groups in society can challenge established hegemony through alternative ideas, cultural practices and political struggles. In the digital age, social media platforms have succeeded in creating a new digital public sphere for such resistance practices. These networks have provided opportunities for marginalized communities, social movements, citizen campaigns and alternative political groups to present their issues, build organizations and gain broad public support. According to Castells (2012), digital networks have created new forms of decentralized social movements and political participation that are fundamentally different from traditional organizational structures. This process does not confine the control of information and communication to the hands of the state or traditional media institutions. It has also given ordinary citizens the ability to express themselves politically.

While digital platforms have the potential to rapidly expand social movements, digital resistance itself should not be considered an independent and completely autonomous process. The ownership structure, commercial objectives, algorithmic priorities, and content control policies of such companies directly affect the reach, visibility, and impact of digital movements. For example, whether a social or political issue spreads widely or goes viral on social media does not depend solely on public support. It is also guided by the platform's algorithmic system, trending structure, and data-driven selection process. According to Fuchs (2021), the true potential of digital democracy can only develop when questions of data rights, platform ownership, transparency, and public control are also seriously addressed. This perspective requires that the potential of digital resistance be viewed not only in terms of the availability of technology, but also in terms of political economy structures.

Another important aspect of digital counter-hegemony is its ability to create alternative knowledge, identity and political consciousness. Social media has given traditionally vulnerable and marginalized group the opportunity to make their experience and perspective public, which can further challenge dominant narrative. Various social movement have used digital media to make issues of human rights, gender equality, environmental justice and political reform central to global discourse. According to Castells (2012), network-based movement create the new forms of collective identity and political participation, where it is possible to develop social cohesion beyond geographical boundary. Instead, these movements have been affected by challenges such as the digital divide, online surveillance, misinformation and platform control. Therefore, digital counter-hegemony needs to be understood not only as a result of technology, but also as an interaction between the social force, political struggle and institutional structure.

Social media thus simultaneously functions to both create and resist hegemony. On the one hand, digital platforms can reinforce dominant power structures through data control, algorithmic management, and commercial interests. On other hand, these same platforms also create new opportunities for alternative ideas, social movement and political resistance. The neo-Gramscian perspective provides an important theoretical basis for understanding this dialectical relationship, where the power and resistance constantly interact. Hegemony in the digital age is not simply a process of control, but also a structure constructed through a continuous process of consensus building, ideological struggle, and resistance (Cox, 1983; Gramsci, 1971). For this reason, the study of digital counter-hegemony provides an opportunity to critically analyze both the democratic potential and limits of social media.

3. Research Gap

The available literature has contributed significantly to the study of platform capitalism, the digital economy, data governance, and the political impact of social media. However, many studies have tended to analyze digital platforms only from an economic or technological perspective. The study of platforms as political structures that construct ideological hegemony is still in its infancy. In particular, the power of digital platforms is not limited to market control or data collection, but also to their ability to influence social consciousness, political consensus, and cultural meaning-making. While existing studies have highlighted aspects of algorithms, the data economy, and surveillance capitalism, there is a lack of sufficient theoretical analysis of how these processes construct hegemony

and consensus in the Gramscian sense. Research that studies the global dominance of digital platforms in relation to neo-Gramscian political economy is limited. For this reason, it seems necessary to study the interrelationships between economic power, ideological control, and social relations in the digital age in more depth.

When studying platform capitalism from a neo-Gramscian perspective, it is necessary to understand the relationship between economic power, cultural leadership, ideological consensus, and digital resistance as a whole. This research aims to address this theoretical gap, contributing to the understanding of how social media platforms construct modern digital hegemony and influence the possibilities of counter-hegemony. It attempts to analyze digital platforms not only as technological innovations or economic institutions, but also as socio-political structures that produce and reproduce power. In particular, the study explains the relationship between data ownership, algorithmic governance, platform control, and the digital public sphere from a neo-Gramscian perspective. This research hopes to address the theoretical gap in the existing literature, and provide new analytical foundations for how hegemony is constructed in digital capitalism? And how can citizens and social movements challenge it? In this way, the study aims to broaden the debate on digital power, democracy, and ideological struggle in contemporary political science.

4. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research method and uses an interpretive and analytical research design based entirely on secondary sources. The theoretical basis is based on a Neo-Gramscian approach, through which the interrelationship between platform capitalism, social media and ideological hegemony is critically analyzed. The necessary facts, concepts and arguments have been collected from published materials available in international peer-reviewed journals, books, book chapters, research reports and reputable academic databases (such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, Sage, Google Scholar and NepJOL). The collected literature has been classified, compared and interpreted through thematic content analysis and document analysis methods. This has identified the main trends of platform capitalism, data governance, digital power, algorithmic control and ideological hegemony created by social media. The credibility, relevance, academic quality, and citation impact of the sources used in the research have been given priority, which is believed to help enhance the validity and reliability of the research. In addition, this study has attempted to clarify the relationship between contemporary digital capitalism and neo-Gramscian political economy by conducting a coordinated analysis of the arguments of various scholars through a comparative and critical literature review (Cader & Sundrijo, 2023; Morton, 2003).

5. Results

The findings of this study are presented with an analysis of the interrelationships between platform capitalism, social media, and hegemony from a neo-Gramscian perspective. Based on mostly secondary sources, this study shows that digital platforms function not only as technical or economic structures, but also as political structures that construct power, ideology, and social consensus. According to the findings, data control, algorithmic governance, digital communication, and platform ownership play a significant role in the construction of contemporary digital hegemony. This section attempts to critically discuss the main findings of the study by linking them to existing literature and neo-Gramscian theoretical frameworks.

The results of this study were based on a neo-Gramscian analysis of the interrelationships between platform capitalism, social media, and digital hegemony. The findings from the study showed that digital platforms were not just technical or economic structures, but also political structures that construct power, ideology, and social consensus. It shows that data control, algorithmic governance, digital communication, and platform ownership play a significant role in the construction of contemporary digital hegemony. In particular, digital platforms have expanded their influence on the process of knowledge, information, and social meaning creation, along with the management of economic resources. This study shows that digital power structures should be understood not only in terms of market relations, but also from a political economy perspective. In the digital age, power seems to be operating through the management of data, algorithms, and information flows rather than direct control. This process has transformed the nature of traditional hegemony, creating a new digital hegemony. The results obtained are categorized into four main thematic areas: (1) digital platforms and capital accumulation, (2) algorithmic control and ideological hegemony, (3) social media and the digital public sphere, and (4) digital counter-hegemony and social movements.

Digital Platform and New Types of Capital Accumulation

The study shows that platform capitalism has transformed contemporary capitalism into a data-driven economic system. According to Srnicek (2017), digital platforms are not limited to market-mediated structures, but have

become key means of data collection, value creation, and capital accumulation. Users' digital activities, search behaviors, social relationships, and consumption tendencies have been transformed into economic resources (Zuboff, 2019). This process has established data ownership and control over digital infrastructure as a key basis of modern economic power. The results of the study show that the business model of digital platforms depends on user participation and data production. Unlike traditional multinational enterprises, digital platforms can scale rapidly by leveraging network effects and digital infrastructure to coordinate ecosystem participants rather than relying on physical assets or incremental foreign direct investment (Garcia-Canal & Guillen, 2026). It positions users not only as service consumers but also as indirect value-producing workers. The impact of gig and platform labor reveals significant divergences between the Global North and South, particularly in how these platforms disrupt social labor relations and subjective working conditions, suggesting to analyze in the frame of 'differential uberization' of labor (Stavola, 2025). The data-driven capital accumulation process has redefined the concept of traditional labor relations and production systems, and it seems to create new inequalities in ownership, control, and profit distribution in the digital economy.

The findings show that large digital companies have dominated the market through digital infrastructure, algorithms and network effects. Such dominance is not only a result of economic competition, but also a process of building power inequalities in the digital economy. Digital platforms challenge many of the assumptions that have framed the economic underpinnings of media power analysis (Flew & McTernan, 2025). From a neo-Gramscian perspective, the economic power of platforms is linked to ideological influence and social control. Because control over digital infrastructure also affects the production of information and knowledge. The dominance of digital platforms has brought about a profound change in the power relations between the state, the market and civil society. As a limited number of companies control digital infrastructure, their influence over the information and communication system seems to have increased. This situation has made the debate on digital sovereignty, regulation and the public interest all the more important. Therefore, it seems necessary to understand platform capitalism not only as an economic system but also as a structure that builds power relations.

Table 1

Major Outcomes of Platform Capitalism and Digital Power Structure

Thematic Dimensions	Key Features	Finding from the study
Data Economy	Collections and Commercial use of User Data	Data has been established as a new source of capital.
Platform Ownership	Control by a Limited numbers of Technology Companies	Power concentrations in digital markets has been increased.
Algorithmic Management	Management of Contents, Advertisement, and user Behavior	Information flows and social priority have been influenced.
Network Effect	The Process through which a large user base Increases Platforms dominance	The possibility of digital monopolies has increased.
Digital Infrastructures	Fundamental structure for communication and market operation	Technology companies have developed into new centers of powers.

The Algorithmic Control and Digital Ideological Hegemony

Another important result of the study is that algorithms act not only as technical systems but also as means of exercising power. Social media platforms influence which information reaches users, which ideas are more visible or preferred, and which content becomes the center of public debate (Beer, 2017). This has made digital platforms a key arena for constructing modern ideological hegemony. Since algorithmic decisions determine the structure of information access, digital platforms play a crucial role in constructing social reality. The information users receive is influenced not only by their free choices, but also by the commercial and political priority of the platform. This highlights the needs for transparency and accountability in digital communication. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, algorithms can be analyzed as tool for the constructing modern ideological leadership.

From a neo-Gramscian perspective, algorithms can play an effective role in the process of establishing dominant ideas as common sense. Targeted advertising, personalized content recommendations, and data-driven communication strategies can easily influence users' perceptions, political preferences, and social behavior (Fuchs, 2021). Digital hegemony is thus linked to processes of cultural and ideological control, along with economic control. It shifts global debates from ethics and human rights toward stability and control, aligning with

calls for sovereign regulation (Asmolov, 2026). In this process, digital platforms can indirectly influence which ideas are more desirable and acceptable in society. Thus, control over information and attention has become an important aspect of modern power relations. Digital hegemony maintains its power through consensus building and practical influence rather than direct and strong repression. As these circulated, especially on Telegram, platforms operated outside local moderation frameworks developed through processes of reconciliation, dialogue, and democratic reconstruction (de Keulenaar & Alves dos Santos Jr, 2026). Therefore, algorithmic governance should be considered an important field of study in contemporary political sociology.

Social media, digital public sphere, and political power

Studies have shown that social media has also brought about significant changes in the nature of the modern public sphere. In the face of democratic malaises such as polarization and disenchantment, as well as systemic crises such as climate change and structural injustice, deliberative innovations are proliferating (Cunningham, 2026). According to Castells (2012), in a network society, the flow of information and communication capabilities directly affect political power relations. Social media have created easy and new opportunities for civic participation, political campaigns and social movements. Digital platforms have become central infrastructures of contemporary populism, shaping how actors communicate, mobilize supporters and contest democratic norms (Yilmaz et al., 2026). This has given citizens the opportunity to express their views across the boundaries of traditional media. Digital networks help social movements to organize quickly and gain broad support. However, inequalities in digital access have also created a situation where not all groups have equal opportunities, so the digital public sphere has become an area of both opportunity and inequality.

But the digital public sphere is not a completely free and equal access sphere. Media as a concept cannot be exhaustively reviewed in one piece (Inobemhe, 2026). The commercial objectives, content control policies and algorithmic priorities of platform companies determine how public discourse is structured. For this reason, social networks are both a means of democratic participation and a structure of power control. The digital public sphere, operated by private companies, seems to create new challenges between democratic governance and private power relations. Undoubtedly, the digital platforms and social media of the evolving hybrid media system have contributed here. They have undermined political party communication hierarchies based on former privileged access to legacy media (Davis, 2026). Striking the balance between content control and freedom of expression has become a complex issue. This calls for new policies and regulations for digital governance. The future of the digital public sphere depends on the relationship between platform accountability and civil rights.

Digital Counter-Hegemony and Social Movement

Studies have shown that social media is not only a space for constructing hegemony but also a space for constructing counter-hegemony. Now in the social and political movements, observers find diverse changes in terms of language, performance, and ideology. Social media has further challenged traditional concepts of organization, leadership, and time and space (Magar, 2026). Digital platforms have provided a great opportunity for marginalized communities, social movements and civic campaigns to present alternative voices. According to Castells (2012), network-based social movements have come to build a different kind of collective identity and resistance than traditional political organizations. Digital media have also provided new opportunities for vulnerable groups to publicize their experiences and demands. With worker shortages and the need for care workers projected to grow, personal care work through digital labor platforms (DLPs) is important to understand (Hopwood et al., 2026). This has helped to challenge dominant narratives and build alternative political consciousness. Social media has been used as an important strategic tool for social change. This process has made the digital sphere an active site of strong power struggles.

However, the possibilities for digital resistance are influenced by platform structure. Algorithmic prioritization, data control, content removal policies, and platform ownership can also limit the reach and impact of digital movements (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Therefore, social media is active as a dialectical arena for both dominance and resistance. The success of digital movements does not depend solely on access to technology; it also requires organizational capacity, political awareness, and alternative knowledge production. Gramsci sees hegemony as a process of producing intellectual and cultural consensus, not as a ruling power maintained through the use of pure force (Magar, 2025). As platform dependence increases, resistance groups are also influenced by the rules and structures of digital companies. For this reason, digital counter-hegemony should not be seen as an independent process, but as a process of continuous negotiation, struggle, and restructuring. In the digital age, dominance and resistance are processes that are in constant interaction with each other.

6. Discussion

The discussion section of this study explains the relationship between platform capitalism, social media, and digital hegemony from a neo-Gramscian political economy perspective. Billionaires are behaving like sovereign entities, wielding infrastructural control that has transformed the public sphere into a regime characterized by engineered legitimacy and exclusion (Regilme, 2026). The study's findings demonstrate that digital platforms are not simply means of communication and economic exchange. They are important structures for constructing contemporary power relations, ideological consensus, and social control. According to Gramsci's view, hegemony is not established solely through the use of force, but rather is maintained by building consensus through ideology, institutions, and social practices (Gramsci, 1971). In the digital age; platform companies are constructing new types of digital hegemony through their control over data, algorithms, and information infrastructure. In this section, the study's findings are discussed in relation to theoretical debates on platform capitalism, algorithmic power, the digital public sphere, and counter-hegemony.

Platforms Capitalism and Digital Capitalist Hegemony

The study's findings support Srnicek's (2017) argument on platform capitalism, according to which digital platforms have become a new organizational form of contemporary capitalism. In traditional capitalism, control over the means of production was the basis of economic power, but in digital capitalism, control over data, algorithms and digital infrastructure has become a source of power (Srnicek, 2017). As this study shows, users' everyday digital activities are embedded in the economic value creation process of platform companies. Data collected from users' behavior, interests, choices, social relationships and communication activities are used for advertising, predictive analysis and market control (Zuboff, 2019). This has created new types of inequalities in digital labor, data ownership and profit distribution (Fuchs, 2021). Digital platforms have transformed user participation from a mere social interaction to a process of economic value creation. This process has transformed the nature of capital accumulation, making data and information control a key basis for modern economic dominance (Srnicek, 2017). As a result, power relations in the digital economy have moved beyond physical productive capacity, becoming linked to ownership of knowledge, information, and technological infrastructure (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

This form of platform capitalism has succeeded in restructuring traditional market relations, expanding the influence of a limited number of technology companies. Due to network effect, data collection capability and control over digital infrastructure, large platform companies have come to exert structural influence not only in economic competition, but also in the social and political sphere (Srnicek, 2017; Van Dijck et al., 2018). The power of digital platform is not based solely on their market share. By bridging geographical divides between urban consumers and rural producers, these platforms create new spaces for economic engagement that are simultaneously local and global (Yang et al., 2026). They also have the ability to influence the structure of communication, consumption, social relations and public discourse. This situation has also raised important political question about regulation, data rights and the public interest in the digital economy (Zuboff, 2019). Thus, platform capitalism needs to be understood not only as a new business model, but also as a socio-economic system that restructures contemporary power relation (Srnicek, 2017).

From a neo-Gramscian perspective, platform dominance is not simply a matter of market control. It is also related to processes of ideological and cultural leadership. Platforms actively frame their changes as neutral, responsive, and ongoing, even when these shifts serve to consolidate power or deepen user dependence (De & Cotter, 2026). According to Gramsci (1971), dominance is not established simply by force, but rather is maintained by building social consensus through ideology, culture, and institutional practices. Digital platforms have developed the ability to influence users' behavior, interests, preferences, and social relationships. Algorithmic selection, content recommendation systems, and data-driven communication strategies can give certain ideas and narratives more visibility (Beer, 2017; Fuchs, 2021). Thus, economic power and ideological power combine to create digital dominance. This conclusion is consistent with Cox's (1983) neo-Gramscian argument that dominance is the combined result of material capacity, ideology, and institutional structure. Digital platforms can build ideological consensus by directing users toward certain types of consumption culture, social values, and political beliefs. In this process, algorithmic governance functions as a key mechanism of modern digital hegemony, influencing information access and the process of social meaning-making (Beer, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to analyze digital hegemony not only as economic control but also as a broader power process that creates social consciousness, cultural leadership, and political influence (Cox, 1983; Gramsci, 1971).

From this perspective, the power of platform companies is related to their ability to lead and build consensus within civil society in a Gramscian sense. Digital platforms play a role in the construction of social reality by influencing

the flow of information, social interaction, and the structure of public discourse (Van Dijck & Poell, 2018). For this reason, digital platforms have evolved not only as economic institutions in modern societies but also as ideological and political power centers. The process of hegemony in digital capitalism is located in the combined result of data ownership, algorithmic control, and social consensus building. Therefore, studying platform capitalism requires a holistic analysis of the interrelationships between economic structure, political power, and cultural influence from a neo-Gramscian perspective (Cox, 1983; Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

Table 2

Relationships between Platform Capitalism and Digital Hegemony

Analytical Dimensions	Role of Platform Capitalism	Neo-Gramscian Interpretation
Data control	Collections and commercial use of user's data	Data is a modern source of the power and capital.
Digital infrastructure	Control over communication system and market operation	A new form of institutional dominance.
Algorithm	Selections of information and determination of visibility	A mechanism for ideological leadership and consensus-buildings.
Network effect	Expansion of dominance by a limited numbers of companies	Concentration of power in the digital spheres.
User participation	Users generate contents, data, and engagement that create economic value for platforms through their continuous interaction.	User participation reinforces digital hegemony by normalizing platform dominance, producing consent, and legitimizing the existing digital order through everyday online practice.

Algorithmic Power and Ideological Control

Another important aspect of this study is the issue of algorithmic governance. The results indicate that algorithms are not neutral technical processes but power mechanisms that determine social preferences, information access and political visibility. By situating algorithmic infrastructures as political actors, this study contributes to ongoing debates on digital governance, feminist security, and the politics of visibility. It calls for critical algorithmic literacy, platform accountability, and policy frameworks safeguarding epistemic diversity in militarized communication (Gombar & Cvitkovic, 2026). According to Beer (2017), algorithms structure social relations through classification, selection and prioritization. In this sense, algorithms are able to act as important tools of modern digital hegemony. Since the content, information and opportunities that digital platforms provide to users are influenced by algorithmic decision-making processes, algorithms have become important means of distributing power. This process links technological decisions with social and political consequences, where some voices may become more visible and influential while other voices may be limited (Beer, 2017). Therefore, algorithmic governance needs to be understood not only as a matter of technical efficiency but also as a political process of power, ideology and social control. The platform emerged as a dominant model after decades of experimentation and trials in search of an organizational structure that would fit the affordances of digital technology (Tornberg, 2023). Algorithms do not only determine which information reaches users. It also influences the way social reality is interpreted. The commercial objective, advertising system, and user engagement strategies of these platforms shape algorithmic priorities. This necessitates a critical study of the values, priorities and power relations embedded in algorithmic structure.

When considering algorithmic control from a neo-Gramsci perspective; digital platforms have the potential to make some ideas, values, and narratives more visible and others less visible. Zuboff's (2019) analysis of surveillance capitalism shows that companies can influence users' future decisions through data collection and behavioral prediction. This suggests that digital power operates through behavioral management and consensus building rather than direct repression. In the Gramsci sense, such a process is related to the construction of ideological hegemony, where dominant structures present their influence as natural and normal (Gramsci, 1971). By managing users' attention, interests, and behavior, digital platforms can reproduce certain types of social and cultural values (Fuchs, 2021). Thus, algorithmic control is not only a means of obtaining economic benefits but also a power mechanism for shaping social consciousness and political perceptions. In this process, data collection and analysis give platform companies the ability to predict user behavior and present content accordingly. The question of digital autonomy has become stronger as such behavioral predictions can indirectly influence the user's independent decision-making ability (Zuboff, 2019). Therefore, it seems necessary to analyze algorithmic governance as a new type of power exercise in the digital age.

Algorithmic power is not limited to information control. It also influences the construction of social reality. The rapid advancement of information technology has significantly democratized access to communication channels, making them accessible and affordable to the vast majority (Weinhardt et al., 2024). What topics users consider important, which political issues are prioritized, and which social groups are more visible can be influenced by the structure of digital platforms. For this reason, algorithmic transparency and accountability have become important topics in the study of digital democracy. Along with the digital transformation of public discourse, algorithmic decision-making can also affect the quality and diversity of democratic discourse. If algorithmic systems are opaque and based on private interests, the digital public sphere can become unequal and limited. Therefore, algorithmic accountability, data governance, and platform regulation have become fundamental requirements of digital democracy. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, algorithmic power is a subtle mechanism for consensus building in modern society. It operates through information structure, visibility and social meaning-making rather than direct control. For this reason, studying dominance in the digital age requires including algorithm, data, and platform structures as critical parts of political power relation (Cox, 1983; Fuchs, 2021).

Social Media and the Restructuring of the Digital Public Sphere

Social media have profoundly changed the very nature of the modern public sphere. According to Castells' (2012) network society theory, digital networks have created new possibilities for political communication, social organization, and collective identity construction. This study shows that social media have provided an important space for citizen participation, social movements, and alternative political expression. Digital platforms have transformed the one-sided structure of traditional media, placing users in an active role in the production and dissemination of information (Jenkins, 2006). This process has been shown to provide citizens with opportunities to directly participate in political issues, conduct social campaigns, and construct alternative narratives (Castells, 2012). In particular, social movements have used social media as an effective means of organizing, mobilizing, and gaining international support (Tufekci, 2017). However, it cannot be concluded that the expansion of digital participation provides equal opportunities for all groups. Digital access, technological knowledge, and socio-economic status also influence the level of participation in the digital public sphere (Van Dijk, 2020). This presents the digital divide as a significant challenge to democratic participation.

But social media cannot be considered a fully democratic sphere. The digital public sphere is controlled by private companies, and the flow of information and public discourse is influenced by the commercial objectives and algorithmic structures of the platforms. This raises new questions about Habermas' ideal of the public sphere, where freedom of public discourse and equal access are crucial. Habermas (1989) defined the public sphere as a space for rational debate and equal participation. However, the increasing influence of private platform companies in the digital public sphere has created a need to rethink this concept. Algorithmic systems that select content, determine visibility, and increase user engagement on social media influence the very structure of public discourse. This has positioned the digital public sphere as a conflictual arena between democratic possibilities and private control of power (Van Dijck et al., 2018). From a neo-Gramscian perspective, this form of the digital public sphere can be understood as a new arena for consensus building and ideological struggle. While dominant ideas can be widely disseminated through digital platforms, alternative ideas can also use the same medium to build resistance (Fuchs, 2021). Thus, social media are not just tools for communication, but also political structures for constructing power, ideology, and social relations.

This study suggests that social media is a space for both democratic opportunity and power control. On the one hand, they amplify citizen voice, while on the other hand, digital platforms exert control over information and attention. This dual nature has established social media as a complex structure of modern political communication. While digital platforms create new possibilities for citizen participation, their private ownership and commercial preferences can also influence the democratic process (Coudry & Mejias, 2019). Therefore, studying the digital public sphere requires a critical analysis of the potential of technology, as well as the power structures, economic interests, and ideological influences that operate it (Cox, 1983; Fuchs, 2021). From a neo-Gramscian perspective, social media is a space for constant struggle between hegemony and counter-hegemony. They can reproduce dominant power structures but at the same time provide opportunities for alternative social consciousness and political resistance, (Gramsci, 1971). For this reason, it is necessary to understand the digital public sphere as a dynamic relationship between democratic freedom and structural control.

Digital Counter-Hegemony and the Potential for Social Change

In Gramscian theory, the potential for counter-hegemony is important alongside hegemony. This study has shown that social media has provided new opportunities for marginalized groups, social movements, and alternative political campaigns. According to Castells (2012), the network-based movements have created a different kind of

political participation than traditional organizational structure. Digital platforms have provided new means for vulnerable and marginalized community to make their experiences, demands, and identities public. This process has further facilitated the creation of alternative knowledge, ideas and political consciousness that challenge dominant narrative (Fuchs, 2021). Social media-based campaigns have been shown to expand the possibility of bringing local issues into global discourse and forging new type of collective identities (Castells, 2012). The creation of digital counter-hegemony does not depend solely on the availability of technology; it also requires political awareness, organizational capacity and the production of alternative ideas. According to Gramsci (1971), to build a real counter-hegemony, it is not enough to simply criticize the dominant ideology, but rather to build a new social consensus and alternative leaderships. In the digital realm, too, social movements have used technology not only as a means of communications but also as a tool for political struggle and social change.

But the possibilities for digital resistance are shaped by platform structures. Couldry and Mejias (2019) have criticized the process by which digital companies transform human lives into data resources through the concept of data colonialism. This suggests that the digital media used for resistance are not themselves entirely independent of power structures. Since the platforms that power digital movements are often owned by private companies, their rules, algorithmic priorities, and content control policies can further influence the reach and impact of resistance, (Van Dijck et al., 2018). This situation requires understanding the potential for digital counter-hegemony in terms of both opportunities and constraints. While digital media have the potential to challenge power structures, they themselves operate within new structures of surveillance, data control, and commercial interests (Zuboff, 2019). From a neo-Gramscian perspective, digital resistance and digital hegemony are in a constant dialectical relationship. Social media can, on the one hand, reproduce dominant ideologies, while on the other hand, they provide opportunities for the construction of alternative social forces (Cox, 1983; Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, it is necessary to analyze digital counter-hegemony not as a completely independent sphere but as a continuous process of power, resistance, and restructuring.

Table 3
Dialectical Dimension of the Digital Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

Dimension	Digital Hegemony	Digital Counter-Hegemony
Information	Algorithmic control and content prioritizations	Alternative information and citizen communications
Power	Centralized control by platform companies	Decentralized social movement
Data	Surveillance and commercial use	Demand for data rights and digital justice
Politics	Capacity to influence public opinions	Citizen participations and resistance
Culture	Reproductions of dominant narrative	Construction of alternative identity and idea

7. Conclusion

This manuscript analyzes the interrelationship between digital platforms, social media, and contemporary power relations from a neo-Gramscian perspective. The study's findings indicate that digital platforms have evolved from mere vehicles for communication and economic exchange to institutions that shape new types of economic, political, and ideological power structures through their control over data, algorithms, and information infrastructure. Platform capitalism has made data and digital infrastructure a major source of modern capital accumulation, giving limited technology companies the ability to exert broad social influence (Srnicsek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). From a neo-Gramscian perspective, digital hegemony is not limited to economic dominance but is associated with processes of algorithmic control, cultural meaning-making, and social consensus production (Cox, 1983; Gramsci, 1971). However, the social media have the potential to reproduce dominant power structure. These same platforms also provide opportunity for the alternative voice, the social movement and the creation of digital counter-hegemony (Castells, 2012; Fuchs, 2021). In this way, power relations in the digital age can be understood as a process of continuous struggle, restructuring and negotiations between the hegemony and counter-hegemony. Ultimately, a critical study of the digital platforms requires understanding technology not as a neutral medium, but as a political structure linked to power, capital, ideology and social changes.

8. Future Research Direction

Future research can expand the study of platform capitalism, social media, and digital hegemony on a broader and more empirical basis. While this study primarily presents a neo-Gramscian analysis based on secondary

sources, future research needs to conduct comparative studies of the impact of digital platforms across countries, regions, and social groups. In particular, how algorithmic decision-making, data governance, digital labor, artificial intelligence, and platform regulation shape new power relations. Future research can analyze the user experience, digital participation of marginalized communities, and the process of digital counter-hegemony in social movements through qualitative and quantitative research methods. Studying the neo-Gramscian perspective in conjunction with other critical theories, such as political economy, surveillance capitalism, and digital colonialism, helps to understand the relationship between power, ideology, and social change in the digital age in a deeper way.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest while preparing this article.

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