

Algorithmic Society: Social Control, Surveillance, and Human Freedom in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of algorithmic societies represents a fundamental transformation in the relationship between technology, institutions, and human autonomy. In contemporary digital environments, algorithms increasingly influence how individuals communicate, access information, participate in social processes, and make decisions. This research paper examines the expanding role of algorithmic systems as mechanisms of social control, surveillance, and behavioural regulation while critically analysing their implications for human freedom in the digital age. The study investigates how artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, social media analytics, and data-driven governance reshape social interactions and public decision-making processes. Drawing from existing research on social media analytics, public health surveillance, sentiment analysis, and computational methods, the paper explores the dual nature of algorithmic systems as both tools for societal improvement and instruments capable of reinforcing control structures.

The research adopts a conceptual review methodology based exclusively on the provided literature, synthesizing studies related to AI-driven social media monitoring, disease surveillance, online public sentiment analysis, and computational language technologies. The analysis identifies that algorithmic systems operate through three interconnected dimensions: data extraction, predictive classification, and behavioural influence. Social media platforms generate large-scale behavioural data that can be processed to identify public opinions, predict social trends, and monitor collective responses during crises. Research on social media-based disease surveillance demonstrates the potential benefits of algorithmic systems in improving public health responses, yet it also reveals concerns regarding privacy, transparency, and possible misuse of personal information (Wang et al., 2023; Terry et al., 2023).

The findings indicate that algorithmic societies create a complex relationship between technological efficiency and individual freedom. While algorithms improve decision-making capacity and enable faster responses to social challenges, they may also introduce invisible forms of surveillance and influence through automated ranking, recommendation systems, and predictive analytics.

Keywords: Algorithmic Society; Artificial Intelligence; Digital Surveillance; Social Control; Human Freedom; Social Media Analytics; Data Governance; Algorithmic Governance; Predictive Systems

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed modern societies into complex algorithmic environments where decisions, interactions, and social processes are increasingly mediated by computational systems. Algorithms that once performed limited mathematical calculations now influence critical areas of human life, including communication, healthcare, governance, education, employment, and political participation. The concept of an algorithmic society refers to a social order in which automated systems collect, analyse, classify, and interpret large volumes of data to shape individual and collective behaviour. These systems operate not only as technical infrastructures but also as mechanisms that influence visibility, access, opportunities, and social outcomes.

The increasing dependence on algorithms has created new possibilities for solving large-scale social problems. In public health, for example, artificial intelligence and social media analytics have enabled researchers and institutions to monitor disease-related discussions, identify emerging health concerns, and understand public perceptions during health crises. Studies examining social media data utilization demonstrate that digital platforms can provide valuable information for disease prediction and outbreak monitoring by analysing patterns in online communication (Wang et al., 2023). Similarly, research on social media's role during infectious disease crises highlights how digital platforms can support public health responses by providing real-time information about community experiences and concerns (Terry et al., 2023).

However, the same algorithmic capabilities that enable social improvement also introduce concerns regarding surveillance, control, and autonomy. Digital platforms continuously collect behavioural data, including user interactions, preferences, communication patterns, and engagement activities. Through machine learning models, this information can be transformed into predictions about individual interests, social trends, and collective behaviour. The ability to classify and predict human actions creates a new form of power where decisions may increasingly be influenced by systems that remain invisible to users. Unlike traditional forms of social control, algorithmic control often operates indirectly through recommendations, rankings, content filtering, and automated decision-making.

The problem addressed in this research is the tension between the benefits of algorithmic systems and their implications for human freedom. While algorithms provide efficiency, personalization, and predictive capabilities, they

may also reduce individual autonomy by shaping what information people encounter and how they interact with digital environments. Social media sentiment analysis studies illustrate how computational systems can measure public opinion and social attitudes, but they also raise questions about interpretation, representation, and potential manipulation (Cruz et al., 2022; Maceda et al., 2023). When algorithmic classifications influence social visibility or decision-making, individuals may become subjects of continuous evaluation and monitoring.

The relevance of this research emerges from the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into social systems. The development of natural language processing models, including multilingual computational approaches, has expanded the ability of machines to analyse human communication across diverse linguistic contexts (Dufter & Schütze, 2020). These developments strengthen algorithmic capabilities but simultaneously increase the importance of understanding how automated systems affect social relationships and individual freedoms.

This study aims to examine the role of algorithmic systems as mechanisms of social control and surveillance while analysing their impact on human freedom in digital societies. The objectives are to explore the theoretical foundations of algorithmic governance, examine the functional processes through which algorithms influence social behaviour, analyse applications in areas such as public health and social media monitoring, and identify ethical challenges related to privacy, transparency, and autonomy.

The scope of this research focuses on algorithmic systems operating within digital communication environments, particularly social media platforms and AI-based analytical systems. The paper does not examine all forms of automation but specifically investigates systems that collect human-generated data and transform it into predictive or regulatory mechanisms. By analysing existing studies on social media analytics, AI applications, and digital surveillance practices, this research contributes to broader discussions about how societies can benefit from algorithmic innovation while protecting fundamental human freedoms.

The significance of this study lies in recognizing that algorithms are not neutral technological tools but socio-technical systems embedded within institutional, economic, and cultural contexts. Understanding algorithmic societies requires examining not only what algorithms can do but also how they influence power relationships, decision-making structures, and individual

agency. As digital transformation continues, maintaining a balance between technological advancement and human rights becomes essential for creating responsible and democratic algorithmic environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Algorithmic Systems and Digital Social Transformation

Existing literature demonstrates that algorithmic systems have become central components of contemporary digital societies. The development of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and large-scale data analytics has enabled organizations to process complex human-generated information at unprecedented levels. Research on social media analytics highlights that digital platforms function as valuable sources of behavioural and social data, allowing researchers to examine public perception, communication patterns, and collective responses (Tobias et al., 2021).

The transformation from traditional information systems to algorithm-driven environments represents a shift from human-controlled interpretation toward automated classification and prediction. Algorithms increasingly determine which information receives attention, which opinions become visible, and how social interactions are structured. This creates a new form of digital organization where computational systems influence social reality through data processing mechanisms.

2.2 Social Media Analytics, Surveillance, and Public Monitoring

A significant area of research focuses on the use of social media analytics for monitoring social and health-related phenomena. During public health emergencies, digital platforms have become important sources for understanding population concerns and behavioural responses. The study by Wang et al. (2023) demonstrates that social media data can support disease outbreak prediction and public perception analysis by identifying patterns within online communication.

Similarly, Abisado et al. (2022) explored the use of low-resource language processing for disease surveillance, showing that artificial intelligence can extend monitoring capabilities in multilingual environments. These applications reveal the positive potential of algorithmic surveillance, particularly when used for collective welfare. However, surveillance capabilities also create risks because the same systems designed for monitoring public health may potentially be adapted for broader behavioural tracking.

The literature therefore presents algorithmic surveillance as a dual-purpose mechanism. It can improve institutional awareness and crisis management, but it may also

challenge privacy expectations. The collection and analysis of user-generated information require careful consideration of consent, transparency, and ethical governance.

2.3 Sentiment Analysis and Algorithmic Interpretation of Human Behaviour

Sentiment analysis represents another major area where algorithms interpret human expression. Research examining Philippine social media contexts demonstrates how machine learning approaches can analyse public emotions and opinions during significant events. The use of Multinomial Naïve-Bayes methods for Twitter sentiment analysis during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how computational models can classify public attitudes at scale. Cruz et al. (2022) further examined whether Twitter functions as an echo chamber by connecting online public sentiments with real-world political outcomes. Their findings contribute to understanding how digital platforms may reflect and influence collective behaviour. However, algorithmic interpretation of human communication remains challenging because language contains cultural, emotional, and contextual complexities.

The development of advanced language models has expanded these capabilities. Maceda et al. (2023) examined GPT-4-based sentiment classification approaches, demonstrating the growing role of large-scale AI systems in analysing social media texts. Despite technological improvements, algorithmic interpretation remains dependent on training data, model design, and contextual limitations.

2.4 Online Identity, Self-Disclosure, and Algorithmic Influence

Digital platforms also reshape human identity and social interaction. Research on online self-disclosure during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that users increasingly relied on digital environments for social support and engagement (Lee et al., 2023). While these interactions create opportunities for connection, they also generate valuable behavioural data that can be analysed by algorithmic systems.

This creates a complex relationship between participation and surveillance. Individuals voluntarily contribute information to digital platforms while simultaneously becoming subjects of algorithmic analysis. The boundary between communication and data extraction becomes increasingly unclear, raising questions about whether users maintain meaningful control over their digital identities.

2.5 Research Gap and Theoretical Positioning

The reviewed literature demonstrates significant progress in understanding algorithmic applications in healthcare, communication, and social analysis. However, a gap remains in integrating these perspectives into a broader

examination of algorithmic societies as systems of power and social regulation. Existing studies often focus on specific applications, such as disease monitoring or sentiment analysis, but fewer studies examine how these technologies collectively reshape human freedom.

This research positions algorithmic society as a socio-technical framework where algorithms function simultaneously as tools of innovation and mechanisms of influence. By synthesizing research on AI, surveillance, social media analytics, and digital behaviour, the study develops a critical understanding of how algorithmic systems affect autonomy, privacy, and social control in the digital age.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual review methodology to examine the relationship between algorithmic systems, social control, surveillance mechanisms, and human freedom in contemporary digital societies. The methodology is based on systematic synthesis and critical interpretation of the provided literature concerning artificial intelligence, social media analytics, computational language processing, digital surveillance, and data-driven public systems. Unlike empirical research focused on collecting new datasets, this research analyses existing scholarly contributions to develop a theoretical understanding of how algorithmic technologies influence social structures.

The conceptual review approach is appropriate because algorithmic society represents a multidisciplinary phenomenon involving technological, social, ethical, and political dimensions. The study integrates findings from research on public health surveillance, sentiment analysis, online behaviour, and AI-driven analytics to examine the broader consequences of algorithmic decision-making. The methodology emphasizes relationships between technological capabilities and social outcomes rather than evaluating individual algorithms alone.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The study develops an Algorithmic Society Analysis Framework consisting of three interconnected layers:

Data Extraction Layer

The first layer examines how algorithmic societies depend on continuous data generation. Digital platforms collect information through user activities such as posting, searching, sharing, commenting, and engagement patterns. Social media platforms have become large-scale behavioural databases where human communication is transformed into machine-readable information.

Research on social media utilization for disease prediction demonstrates how online discussions can provide

meaningful signals regarding public concerns, health behaviours, and emerging issues (Wang et al., 2023). Similarly, social media-based health monitoring studies demonstrate that user-generated content can support institutional decision-making through computational analysis (Abisado et al., 2022).

However, data extraction introduces concerns regarding ownership and control. Although users generate digital information, algorithmic systems determine how this information is processed and applied. This creates an imbalance between individuals who provide data and organizations that possess the technological capability to analyse it.

Algorithmic Processing Layer

The second layer focuses on computational mechanisms that transform raw data into meaningful classifications, predictions, or recommendations. Machine learning models identify patterns within large datasets and produce outputs that influence decisions. Examples include sentiment classification, disease prediction models, recommendation systems, and automated content ranking.

The development of natural language processing technologies has significantly expanded algorithmic ability to interpret human communication. Multilingual language models demonstrate how AI systems can analyse diverse linguistic data, allowing algorithms to process communication beyond traditional computational limitations (Dufter & Schütze, 2020).

Sentiment analysis represents a major example of algorithmic interpretation. Studies using machine learning approaches to examine Twitter discussions during health crises demonstrate how algorithms can classify emotional responses and public attitudes (Philippine Twitter Sentiments during Covid-19 Pandemic using Multinomial Naïve-Bayes, 2020). While such systems provide valuable insights, they also introduce interpretative challenges because human language includes cultural meanings, ambiguity, and social context.

Behavioural Influence Layer

The third layer examines how algorithmic outputs influence human decisions and social behaviour. Algorithms do not merely observe digital activities; they increasingly shape future interactions by determining what information users encounter. Recommendation systems, automated rankings, and personalized content streams influence attention patterns and potentially affect opinions and choices.

The relationship between algorithms and behaviour creates a subtle form of social control. Unlike traditional authority structures, algorithmic influence often operates invisibly. Individuals may not recognize how automated systems organize their digital experiences. The result is a

shift from direct regulation toward predictive and adaptive forms of influence.

3.3 Theoretical Foundation

The research is positioned within the theoretical perspective of algorithmic governance, where computational systems become active participants in organizing social processes. Algorithmic governance suggests that decision-making increasingly depends on data-driven classifications rather than solely on human judgement.

Within this framework, algorithms function as institutional actors because they influence resource allocation, information visibility, and social participation. In healthcare environments, AI-based monitoring systems can support faster responses to public health challenges. Research on infectious disease surveillance highlights how social media and digital systems contribute to understanding public reactions during crises (Terry et al., 2023).

At the same time, algorithmic governance raises concerns about accountability. When automated systems influence decisions, responsibility becomes difficult to identify. Errors may emerge from biased datasets, incomplete information, or limitations within computational models. Therefore, algorithmic systems require human oversight and ethical governance mechanisms.

3.4 Social Control Mechanisms in Algorithmic Societies

This study identifies four major mechanisms through which algorithms contribute to social control:

Predictive Classification

Algorithms classify individuals and groups based on behavioural patterns. Predictive systems analyse historical data to estimate future outcomes. In public health, prediction can support disease monitoring and resource planning. However, prediction can also influence how individuals are perceived and treated within digital systems.

The classification process creates categories that may affect visibility and opportunities. Because algorithmic categories are often complex and invisible, individuals may have limited ability to challenge decisions made through automated processes.

Information Filtering

Digital platforms use algorithms to determine information distribution. Content ranking systems influence which ideas, opinions, and discussions receive attention. This creates an environment where algorithmic decisions affect public discourse.

Research examining social media political sentiments demonstrates that online platforms can reflect and influence collective opinions, highlighting the connection between digital communication and real-world outcomes (Cruz et al., 2022).

Behavioural Prediction

Algorithmic systems analyse past behaviour to predict future actions. This capability enables personalization but may also create behavioural expectations. When systems continuously predict users' preferences, they may reinforce existing patterns and reduce exposure to alternative perspectives.

The concept of algorithmic influence therefore challenges traditional assumptions about individual autonomy. Human choices may remain voluntary, but the environment in which choices occur is increasingly structured by automated systems.

Continuous Surveillance

Digital surveillance differs from traditional monitoring because it is embedded within everyday activities. Users generate data through ordinary digital participation, making surveillance less visible. Online self-disclosure studies demonstrate that digital platforms provide social benefits while simultaneously creating extensive data trails (Lee et al., 2023).

This creates a paradox: participation enables connection and support but also increases exposure to algorithmic observation.

3.5 Application Analysis: Public Health as an Algorithmic Case

Public health represents a significant example of both the benefits and risks of algorithmic society. During infectious disease outbreaks, governments and health organizations require rapid access to information. AI-driven social media monitoring can identify emerging concerns, analyse public sentiment, and support communication strategies.

Studies on disease surveillance demonstrate that artificial intelligence can improve monitoring systems by analysing large-scale social data (Wang et al., 2023; Tobias et al., 2021). In countries with linguistic diversity, low-resource language processing approaches provide additional opportunities for inclusive health monitoring (Abisado et al., 2022).

However, public health applications also demonstrate ethical challenges. Health-related information can be sensitive, and algorithmic monitoring systems require careful protection against misuse. The challenge is creating systems that provide social benefits without transforming public participation into unrestricted surveillance.

3.6 Ethical Evaluation Model

To analyse the impact of algorithmic systems on human freedom, this research applies four ethical evaluation dimensions:

Transparency:

Users should understand how algorithms collect and process information. Lack of transparency limits individuals' ability to evaluate or challenge automated decisions.

Accountability:

Organizations implementing algorithmic systems must remain responsible for outcomes produced by automated processes.

Privacy Protection:

Data collection should respect individual rights and prevent unnecessary exposure of personal information.

Human Agency:

Algorithmic systems should support human decision-making rather than replace individual autonomy.

These principles are essential because algorithmic efficiency alone cannot determine social value. A technically advanced system may still produce harmful outcomes if it lacks ethical safeguards.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

This research has several limitations. First, the study is based on conceptual synthesis rather than primary empirical data collection. Therefore, conclusions depend on interpretations of existing research. Second, algorithmic technologies continue to evolve rapidly, meaning social impacts may change as systems become more advanced.

Additionally, the provided literature focuses strongly on social media analytics, healthcare monitoring, and AI applications. While these areas provide valuable insights, other algorithmic environments such as financial systems, employment platforms, and government decision systems are beyond the direct scope of this analysis.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how algorithms function as both technological tools and social structures. It highlights the need to evaluate algorithmic systems not only through technical performance but also through their consequences for human freedom, equality, and democratic participation.

4. RESULTS / FINDINGS

The analysis identifies that algorithmic society operates through a complex interaction between technological capability, institutional objectives, and human behaviour. The findings indicate that algorithms have developed beyond simple computational tools and now function as systems that organize, classify, and influence social reality. Three primary outcomes emerge from the analysis: expansion of data-driven social monitoring, transformation of human communication into measurable behavioural signals, and the creation of new forms of algorithmic influence.

First, the findings demonstrate that algorithmic systems significantly enhance the ability of institutions to observe and interpret large-scale social activities. Social media analytics research shows that digital platforms provide

valuable information for understanding public perception, health concerns, and collective responses during crises (Wang et al., 2023). AI-based surveillance approaches have enabled organizations to identify patterns that would be difficult to detect through traditional methods. In public health contexts, algorithmic monitoring contributes to disease surveillance and crisis management by analysing online discussions and behavioural indicators (Terry et al., 2023). However, this expanded monitoring capacity also increases concerns regarding privacy, data ownership, and the possibility of excessive surveillance.

Second, the findings reveal that algorithmic systems transform human communication into structured data that can be analysed and categorized. Sentiment analysis technologies demonstrate how machine learning models interpret emotional expressions, opinions, and social attitudes from digital conversations. Studies examining social media sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic show that computational methods can identify public reactions at scale, providing insights into collective emotions and information patterns. However, algorithmic interpretation remains limited because human communication involves cultural context, irony, ambiguity, and social meaning that cannot always be accurately represented through computational classification (Maceda et al., 2023).

Third, the study finds that algorithmic systems create indirect mechanisms of behavioural influence. Through recommendation systems, content ranking, and predictive models, algorithms shape users' digital environments. Research on online self-disclosure demonstrates that digital platforms encourage participation and social connection while simultaneously producing behavioural data that can be analysed and utilized by algorithmic systems (Lee et al., 2023). This creates a dual condition where individuals experience increased digital participation but reduced awareness of how their information influences automated decisions.

The findings also identify a significant contradiction within algorithmic society. Algorithms provide substantial social benefits, particularly in healthcare, communication, and information management, yet the same systems may contribute to reduced transparency and weakened individual control. The ability of algorithms to predict behaviour creates opportunities for personalized services but also introduces risks of manipulation and social categorization.

Overall, the findings suggest that algorithmic society should not be understood only as a technological advancement but as a transformation of social organization. Algorithms increasingly influence relationships between individuals, institutions, and information systems. The future development of

algorithmic societies depends on establishing ethical governance structures that ensure technological innovation remains aligned with human rights and democratic values.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that algorithmic systems represent both an opportunity and a challenge for contemporary societies. The literature confirms that artificial intelligence and social media analytics can improve decision-making, particularly in areas requiring rapid information processing. Public health surveillance provides a clear example where algorithms support early detection, public communication, and crisis response (Wang et al., 2023; Tobias et al., 2021). These applications demonstrate the positive potential of algorithmic systems when designed for collective benefit.

However, the expansion of algorithmic capabilities also requires critical examination of their social consequences. The central issue is not the existence of algorithms but the increasing dependence on automated systems for interpreting human behaviour. When algorithms classify individuals, determine visibility, or predict future actions, they influence social opportunities and experiences. This creates a shift from traditional forms of authority toward computational forms of control.

The findings support the argument that algorithmic surveillance differs from conventional surveillance because it is integrated into everyday digital participation. Users voluntarily contribute information through communication, engagement, and self-expression, but this information becomes part of broader analytical systems. The research on online self-disclosure during the pandemic illustrates this tension between digital connection and data exposure (Lee et al., 2023).

A major theoretical implication is that algorithmic governance requires reconsideration of human autonomy. Although individuals continue to make choices, those choices increasingly occur within environments structured by automated systems. Recommendation algorithms, sentiment analysis, and predictive technologies influence what information users encounter and how social realities are represented.

The comparison of existing literature also reveals that algorithmic systems are not inherently oppressive or beneficial. Their impact depends on institutional purposes, design principles, and governance mechanisms. AI-based disease monitoring demonstrates how algorithms can contribute to social welfare, while uncontrolled data collection creates potential risks for privacy and freedom. Several limitations must be acknowledged. Algorithmic systems are highly context-dependent, and their effects

vary across different social environments. Additionally, computational models may reproduce existing biases within training data, creating unequal outcomes. Research focusing on multilingual AI systems highlights the importance of addressing linguistic and cultural diversity in algorithmic development (Dufter & Schütze, 2020).

Therefore, the future of algorithmic society requires a balance between innovation and ethical responsibility. Transparency, accountability, and human oversight are essential principles for ensuring that algorithms enhance human capabilities rather than restrict individual freedom.

6. CONCLUSION

This research examined algorithmic society as a technological and social transformation characterized by increased dependence on artificial intelligence, data analytics, and automated decision-making systems. The analysis demonstrates that algorithms have become influential structures shaping communication, surveillance, governance, and human behaviour in the digital age.

The study contributes to understanding algorithmic society by showing that algorithms operate through three interconnected processes: data extraction, computational interpretation, and behavioural influence. These processes allow institutions to gain valuable insights from digital activities while simultaneously creating concerns regarding privacy, autonomy, and transparency.

The literature reviewed indicates that algorithmic systems provide significant benefits in areas such as public health monitoring, disease surveillance, and social analysis. Research demonstrates that AI-based approaches can improve the understanding of public concerns and support institutional responses during complex social challenges (Abisado et al., 2022; Terry et al., 2023). However, technological capability alone does not guarantee socially responsible outcomes.

The major contribution of this research is the argument that algorithms must be evaluated not only according to technical performance but also according to their influence on human freedom. In algorithmic societies, the challenge is maintaining a balance between data-driven efficiency and individual autonomy.

Future research should further investigate ethical algorithm design, democratic oversight mechanisms, and strategies for improving public understanding of automated systems. As algorithmic technologies continue to expand, societies must ensure that digital transformation supports human dignity, equality, and freedom rather than creating invisible systems of control.

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