



Research Article

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Beyond Domination and Deliberation: A Foucault-Habermas Synthesis on Power, Discourse, and Critical Communication in the Digital Public Sphere

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze the relationship between communication, power, and discourse through a critical synthesis of the thought of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas within the framework of critical communication theory. This study is motivated by the strengthening of communication distortions in the digital public space, when discourse is not only a means of exchanging meanings, but also a mechanism for the production of truth, normalization, opinion formation, and legitimacy of power. This study uses a qualitative approach with a critical literature review design. The research data is sourced from the primary works of Foucault and Habermas as well as supporting academic literature on critical communication theory, digital media, algorithms, public space, and surveillance capitalism. The analysis is carried out thematically-critically through the identification of key concepts, categorization of themes, comparison of Foucault-Habermas thought, and the preparation of conceptual synthesis. The findings of the study show that discourse works as a mechanism of production of a truth regime that determines what is considered legitimate, normal, and acceptable in the public sphere. In addition, modern communication is distorted when communicative actions are replaced by strategic actions controlled by political, economic, bureaucratic, media, and algorithmic interests of digital platforms. The Foucault-Habermas synthesis shows that critical communication is a dual arena: on the one hand it can be an instrument of domination, but on the other hand it can be a space of emancipation through reflective consciousness, the production of counter-discourse, and the expansion of deliberative public space. The originality of this article lies in the offer of a Foucault-Habermas conceptual synthesis to understand the dominance, distortion, and emancipation of communication in digital public spaces, especially in the context of Indonesian society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary public communication is increasingly difficult to understand as a neutral process in the exchange of messages. The development of digital media, social media platforms, algorithms, and data-driven political communication has transformed the public space into an arena for the production of meaning, the struggle for legitimacy, and the formation of opinions. In the digital space, discourse is not only disseminated through the media, but is also curated, prioritized, and amplified by algorithmic mechanisms that work based on the logic of user engagement, economic interests, and political influence. This condition makes society not only dealing with information, but also with the power structure that determines what information is seen, who is heard, and what narrative is considered true. In Indonesia, this phenomenon can be seen in the practice of political communication, electability surveys, media reporting, identity politics, and polarization of digital public spaces which show that language and discourse have an important role in shaping social reality and the legitimacy of power (Aswar et al., 2025; Qudratullah et al., 2025).

Academically, the relationship between communication, power, and discourse has been discussed through several literary trends. First, Michel Foucault's thought-based studies emphasize that discourse does not simply represent reality, but forms objects, subjects, knowledge, and the regime of truth through power/knowledge relations (Foucault, 1977, 2013; Gordon, 1980; Hall, 2001). Second, Jürgen Habermas's thought-based study sees communication as a means of forming a common understanding, but also shows that communication can be distorted when communicative actions are replaced by strategic actions and when the lifeworld is colonized by economic systems, bureaucracy, and administrative power (Habermas, 1985b, 1998). Third, contemporary critical communication studies expand these two traditions by reading digital media, surveillance capitalism, algorithmic power, and echo chambers as new forms of dominance in digital public spaces (Almuqren, 2023; Capodivacca & Giacomini, 2024; Fuchs, 2016, 2020).

Although these three groups of literature have made important contributions, there are still gaps in studies that need to be answered. Some Foucauldian studies tend to be strong in dismantling how discourse works as a mechanism of power, but lack a normative orientation on how communication can be corrected deliberatively. In contrast, the Habermasian approach provides a normative basis for rational communication and public space, but it is often criticized for being less sensitive to the presence of power inherent in any discourse practice. Meanwhile, contemporary digital communication studies have largely discussed algorithms, surveillance capitalism, and polarization, but have not always made integrative connections between the production of truth regimes, communication distortions, and the potential for emancipation. Therefore, a conceptual synthesis is needed that brings together Foucault and Habermas to understand communication as an arena of domination as well as a possible social change.

Based on this gap, this article aims to analyze the relationship between communication, power, and discourse through a critical synthesis of the thought of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas within the framework of critical communication theory. In particular, this article seeks to explain three things: first, how discourse works as a mechanism for the production of the

truth regime in communication; second, how communication distortions occur through the colonization of digital public spaces by political, economic, bureaucratic, media, and algorithmic interests; Third, how critical communication can be understood as an arena that contains dominance as well as the potential for emancipation through reflective awareness, the production of counter-discourse, and the expansion of deliberative public space.

The main argument of this article is that communication cannot be understood simply as a medium of message delivery, but must be read as an arena of meanings that is always related to power, knowledge, institutions, and technology. Foucault helps explain that discourse produces truth, shapes subjects, and normalizes power relations, while Habermas helps show that communication still has emancipatory potential when directed at rational discourse, equal participation, and critique of systemic distortions. By synthesizing the two, this article offers an understanding that critical communication is a dual arena: it can be an instrument of domination, but it can also be a space for resistance, the formation of critical awareness, and social change in a digital society.

2. METHODOLOGY

The units of analysis in this study are texts and theoretical ideas about communication relations, power, discourse, communication distortion, and emancipation. The focus of the research is directed at the main concepts of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, such as power/knowledge, regime of truth, normalization, communicative action, strategic action, lifeworld, system, colonization of the lifeworld, and ideal speech situation (Foucault, 1977; Gordon, 1980; Habermas, 1985b, 1998).

This study uses a qualitative approach with a critical literature review design. This design was chosen because the research does not aim to test hypotheses quantitatively, but to build a conceptual synthesis of how communication works as an arena for the production of truth, the distortion of public space, and the possibility of emancipation. Within this framework, Foucault is used to read the operation of power through discourse, while Habermas is used to understand the distortions of communication due to the dominance of strategic actions and systemic colonization.

The source of research data comes from secondary data in the form of primary works by Foucault and Habermas, as well as supporting academic literature on critical communication theory, digital media, algorithms, public space, and surveillance capitalism. Supporting literature is used to expand reading of the context of digital communication and Indonesia, especially related to algorithmic power, political surveys, media reporting, and polarization of public space (Almuqren, 2023; Aswar et al., 2025; Capodivacca & Giacomini, 2024; Fuchs, 2016).

The data collection technique is carried out through literature study by searching, selecting, reading, and recording literature relevant to the three main focuses of the research: the production of the truth regime through discourse, the distortion of communication in digital public spaces, and the Foucault-Habermas synthesis of critical communication as an arena of domination and emancipation.

Data analysis is carried out thematically-critically through the identification of key concepts, categorization of themes, comparison of Foucault and Habermas thoughts, and the preparation of conceptual synthesis. The validity of the study is maintained through the use of relevant primary and secondary sources, consistency of concept interpretation, and the connection between the research questions, analysis results, discussion, and conclusions.

3. RESULTS

Based on a themaculous-critical analysis of the works of Foucault, Habermas, and the critical communication theory literature, this study finds three main patterns. First, discourse works as a mechanism for the production of truth that normalizes power relations. Second, public communication is distorted when the logic of systems, markets, bureaucracy, and algorithms replaces an orientation on common understanding. Third, critical communication still has emancipatory potential, but not in the form of total liberation from power, but through the production of counter-discourse and the expansion of deliberative space.

Discourse and Production of the Truth Regime in Communication

Based on a reading of Foucault's work and the critical communication literature, it is found that discourse cannot be understood as a neutral means of conveying meaning, but rather as a social practice that forms objects, subjects, knowledge, and boundaries of truth in society (Foucault, 2013). Discourse works through *the power/knowledge* relationship, which is the reciprocal relationship between power and knowledge that determines what is considered right, who has the authority to speak, and what narrative gains legitimacy in the public space (Gordon, 1980; Hall, 2001).

In the context of communication, literature data show that power does not always work through direct coercion, but through the production of meaning, the repetition of narratives, the normalization of social categories, and the restriction of alternative views (Foucault, 1977, 2013). This mechanism can be seen in the practice of political communication, media reporting, electability surveys, and digital platforms that produce and disseminate certain truth claims to the public (Capodivacca & Giacomini, 2024; Qudratullah et al., 2025). To clarify these findings, conceptual data on the relationship between discourse, power, and the production of truth regimes can be visualized as follows:

Table. 1 The relationship between discourse, power, and the production of the regime of truth

Aspects Analyzed	Conceptual Evidence from the Literature	Discourse Work Pattern	Implications in Communication
Truth production	Discourse shapes what is considered legitimate and acceptable knowledge in society.	Discourse determines the boundaries between information that is considered true, rational, scientific, or distorted.	Communication not only conveys a message, but also shapes the public's perception of the truth.
Authority speaks	Not all subjects have the same position to	Institutions, media, the state, academics, and social elites	Communication spaces tend to amplify the

Aspects Analyzed	Conceptual Evidence from the Literature	Discourse Work Pattern	Implications in Communication
	speak and be heard in public spaces.	have greater power in determining the dominant narrative.	voices of those who have social legitimacy and weaken alternative narratives.
Normalization of meaning	Discourse works through the repetition of certain narratives until it seems natural and natural.	Social terms, labels, and categories are used to shape the public's understanding of normal and abnormal.	Communication can be a tool of normalization that makes dominance seem natural.
Restriction of alternative narratives	Dominant discourse often limits, removes or weakens different views.	Narratives that do not conform to the dominant truth regime can be labeled negative, considered irrational, or illegitimate.	Public communication has the potential to become an arena for exclusion for groups or ideas that are not in line with dominant power.
Subject formation	Individuals are formed through categories and identities produced by discourse.	The subject understands himself through language, norms, and social categories that are constantly produced in communication.	Communication plays a role in shaping the way individuals understand themselves, their social position, and their relationship with power.

Discourse in communication works through four main patterns, namely producing truth, determining the authority of speech, normalizing meaning, and limiting alternative narratives, so that communication not only represents reality, but also shapes social realities that are considered legitimate, reinforces the position of dominant actors such as the state, the media, academic institutions, survey institutions, and social elites, and eliminates dissenting views through the repetition of certain narratives and labeling (Foucault, 2013; Hall, 2001; Aswar et al., 2025).

These findings show that communication cannot be understood as a neutral process in the exchange of messages, because communication is always involved in the process of truth production, subject formation, and the regulation of power relations. Through discourse, power works subtly by shaping the way society understands reality, determining who to trust, and setting boundaries between what is considered right and wrong, normal and deviant, and rational and irrational (Foucault, 1977; Gordon, 1980).

An important implication of these findings is that the study of communication needs to move beyond mere analysis of messages and the effects of communication. Communication analysis must pay attention to the power structures that allow a message to be produced, disseminated, received, and legitimized as truth. In the context of digital media, these findings

are increasingly relevant because algorithms, social media platforms, and user engagement logic not only disseminate information, but also help regulate the visibility of discourse and determine which narratives gain public attention (Capodivacca & Giacomini, 2024).

Thus, this subchapter emphasizes that discourse is an important instrument in the production of the regime of truth. Discourse is not only a means of communication, but also a mechanism of power that shapes knowledge, regulates subjects, normalizes meaning, and limits alternative understandings in public spaces (Qudratullah et al., 2025).

Communication Distortion and Colonization of Digital Public Space

Based on a reading of Habermas's communicative action theory and contemporary critical communication literature, it is found that modern communication is often distorted when communicative actions oriented towards common understanding are replaced by strategic actions controlled by political, economic, bureaucratic, media, and digital platform interests (Fuchs, 2020; Habermas, 1985a, 1998). In the context of digital public spaces, these distortions are getting stronger because algorithms not only distribute information, but also regulate the visibility of discourse, shape user preferences, strengthen echo chambers, and direct public communication based on the logic of engagement and economic benefits (Almuqren, 2023).

Literature data also show that the colonization of the lifeworld occurs when the space of social life that should be built through dialogue, mutual understanding, and the exchange of rational arguments is increasingly controlled by systemic logics in the form of money, administrative power, media interests, and platform technology (Habermas, 1985b). In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon can be seen in the practice of digital political communication, the dissemination of official narratives, the formation of opinions through social media, and the use of communication strategies that are more directed at influencing public perception than opening up equal discourse spaces (Handoko & Swastiningsih, 2025). To clarify these findings, the forms of communication distortion and colonization of digital public spaces can be visualized in the following matrix.

Table. 2 Communication Distortion Matrix and Digital Public Space Colonization

Aspects Analyzed	Conceptual Evidence from the Literature	Forms of Communication Distortion	Implications in Digital Public Space
Dominance of strategic actions	Habermas distinguishes communicative actions that are oriented towards mutual understanding and strategic actions that are oriented towards instrumental success (Habermas, 1985a).	Communication is used to influence, direct, or manipulate public opinion.	The public space shifted from an arena of rational dialogue to an arena of struggle for influence.
Colonization of the lifeworld	The economic, political, and bureaucratic systems take over the living space that should be	The interests of money, administrative power, and institutional logic	Social, moral, and public solidarity values are reduced

Aspects Analyzed	Conceptual Evidence from the Literature	Forms of Communication Distortion	Implications in Digital Public Space
Media agenda and elite interests	built through rational discourse (Habermas, 1985b).	dominate public communication.	to tools of legitimacy or commodities.
	The media and political actors have a great capacity in determining issues that are considered important by the public (Fuchs, 2016).	Certain issues are magnified, while others are marginalized according to political or economic interests.	The public does not always have an equal, diverse, and deliberative space for information.
Algorithmic power	Digital platforms distribute content based on the logic of user engagement, not the quality of the argument (Fuchs, 2020).	Algorithms reinforce bias, polarization, information personalization, and <i>echo chambers</i> .	Users find it increasingly difficult to find alternative perspectives and rational discourse weakens.
Pseudo-communication	Dialogue appears to take place, but is substantively controlled by actors who dominate the definition of the situation (Habermas, 1985a; Handoko & Swastiningsih, 2025).	Public criticism is silenced, negatively labeled, or diverted through strategic framing.	The digital public space seems open, but it can turn into a space for opinion manipulation.

Communication distortion in digital public spaces works through three main patterns, namely the shift in communication from communicative actions to strategic actions, the colonization of *the lifeworld* by political, economic, bureaucratic, and media interests, and the strengthening of algorithmic power that regulates the visibility of information based on *the logic of engagement*, personalization, and platform benefits. These three patterns show that digital public spaces are not only a means of public participation, but can also be an arena for opinion manipulation, polarization, *echo chamber formation*, and weakening of rational discourse (Fuchs, 2020; Habermas, 1985b).

These findings show that digital public spaces cannot be fully understood as open, free, and equal democratic spaces. In Habermas's perspective, the quality of public communication is determined by the actors' ability to rationally test claims of truth, normative accuracy, and honesty. However, when communication is dominated by strategic actions, economic-political interests, and algorithmic mechanisms, the process of testing such claims becomes disrupted and communication turns into an instrument of influence, legitimacy, or manipulation (Habermas, 1985a, 1985b).

The implication of these findings is that the study of digital communication needs to pay attention to how systemic power works through media, platforms, algorithms, and elite interests in shaping public opinion. Digital media does open up wider opportunities for participation, but at the same time it can also deepen communication distortions if the

distribution of information is determined more by the logic of user involvement and economic benefits than by the quality of arguments and public interest.

Thus, this subchapter affirms that the colonization of digital public space occurs when communication that is supposed to be a means of mutual understanding turns into an arena of strategic action controlled by political, economic, bureaucratic, media, and algorithmic power of platforms. This condition shows that communication emancipation does not only depend on open digital access, but also requires strengthening critical literacy, platform transparency, and discourse space that allows for a more equal and deliberative exchange of arguments.

The Foucault-Habermas Synthesis: Critical Communication as an Arena of Domination and Emancipation

Based on a reading of the thoughts of Foucault, Habermas, and the critical communication theory literature, it is found that critical communication cannot be understood only as a space of domination or only as a space of rational deliberation, but rather as a dual arena where power works as well as where the possibility of emancipation is built. Foucault helps explain that power is always present in discourse and works through the production of truth, normalization, and the formation of the subject, while Habermas provides a normative basis that communication still has emancipatory potential when directed to communicative action, rational discourse, and liberation from systemic distortions (Foucault, 2013; Gordon, 1980; Habermas, 1985a, 1985b).

Literature data also show that the tension between Foucault and Habermas should not be understood as absolute contradictions, but can be synthesized to read contemporary communication more fully. In this synthesis, critical communication is understood as a reflective practice that dismantles the dominant truth regime, identifies communication distortions, produces counter-discourse, and encourages the formation of a more inclusive and deliberative public space (Fuchs, 2020; Ingram, 1994; Yang, 2022). To clarify the synthesis between Foucault and Habermas, the relationship between dominance and emancipation in critical communication can be visualized in the following matrix:

Table 3. Foucault-Habermas Synthesis Matrix in Critical Communication

Aspects Analyzed	Perspective Foucault	Habermas Perspective	Synthesis in Critical Communication
The essence of communication	Communication is always in the relationship of discourse and power (Foucault, 2013).	Communication is ideally directed at mutual understanding through communicative actions (Habermas, 1985a).	Communication is understood as an arena of the battle of meaning between domination and the possibility of emancipation.
Position of power	Power is productive, diffuse, and present in every social practice (Gordon, 1980).	Power can distort communication when strategic actions replace	Power needs to be dismantled and criticized so that communication does not stop being a tool

Aspects Analyzed	Perspective Foucault	Habermas Perspective	Synthesis in Critical Communication
		communicative actions (Habermas, 1985b).	of legitimacy of domination.
Source of dominance	Domination arises through the regime of truth, normalization, and the formation of the subject (Foucault, 2013).	Domination arises through the colonization of the lifeworld by economic, bureaucratic, and political systems (Habermas, 1985b).	The dominance of communication occurs through a combination of discourse, institutions, economic-political systems, and digital technology.
Forms of emancipation	Emansipasi berlangsung melalui perlawanan diskursif dan produksi wacana tandingan.	Emancipation takes place through a rational discourse that is free from domination (Habermas, 1985a).	Emancipation is understood as a reflective process through discourse criticism, critical literacy, and the expansion of deliberative space.
Digital relevance	Digital platforms can strengthen the surveillance, normalization, and production of subjects.	Digital platforms can amplify communication distortion and colonization of public spaces.	Digital communication should be analyzed as a space that opens up participation, but is also vulnerable to algorithms, data capitalism, and opinion manipulation.

The Foucault-Habermas synthesis shows three main patterns in understanding critical communication. First, communication is an arena of dominance because discourse, institutions, media, economic-political systems, and digital technology can shape the truth, direct opinions, and normalize power relations. Second, communication also contains the potential for emancipation because the public space still allows the emergence of criticism, counter-discourse, and rational discourse that challenges domination. Third, the emancipation of communication cannot be understood as a total liberation from power, but as a reflective and continuous process to dismantle distortions, expand participation, and build a more equal space for dialogue.

These findings suggest that the main contribution of the Foucault-Habermas synthesis lies in its ability to read communication dialectically. Foucault provides an analytical tool for understanding how power works subtly through discourse, truth regimes, normalization, and subject formation. Meanwhile, Habermas provides a normative orientation to assess the quality of communication based on discursive rationality, equal participation, and freedom from systemic domination(Foucault, 2013; Habermas, 1985b, 1985a).

Implicitly, critical communication needs to be understood as a practice that not only dismantles dominance, but also builds the possibility of emancipation. In the context of digital public space, this means that communication analysis is not enough to only look at the content of the message, but also to read how algorithms, media, countries, markets, and social actors shape the visibility of discourse, regulate public opinion, and determine who acquires space to speak and be heard.

Thus, the Foucault-Habermas synthesis enriches critical communication theory because it is able to explain two sides of communication simultaneously: communication as a mechanism of domination and communication as a space of resistance. Emancipation in communication is not an ideal condition that is completed, but a continuous process through critical awareness, the production of counter discourse, the strengthening of public literacy, and the expansion of discourse spaces that are more inclusive, reflective, and deliberative.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that communication cannot be understood as a neutral process in conveying messages, but rather as an arena where discourse, knowledge, and power form each other. The three main findings resulting from this study show that, first, discourse functions as a mechanism of production of the truth regime that determines what is considered legitimate, normal, and acceptable in the public sphere. Second, modern communication is distorted when communicative actions oriented towards mutual understanding are replaced by strategic actions controlled by political, economic, bureaucratic, media, and digital algorithm interests. Third, although communication is prone to become an instrument of domination, critical communication still has emancipatory potential through the formation of reflective awareness, the production of counter-discourse, and the expansion of more deliberative public spaces.

These findings can be explained through the relationship between discourse, power, and modern communication structures. In Foucault's perspective, discourse not only represents reality, but also participates in shaping social reality through knowledge production, normalization, and subject formation (Foucault, 2013; Gordon, 1980). Therefore, a meaning can gain the status of "truth" not solely because of its objective value, but because it is supported by certain institutions, authorities, media, and social practices. Meanwhile, in Habermas's perspective, communication distortion occurs when the space of social life that should be built through rational dialogue is increasingly controlled by the logic of the system in the form of money, administrative power, political interests, and instrumental mechanisms (Habermas, 1985a, 1985b). Thus, dominance in communication arises because discourse and systems work simultaneously: discourse forms the boundaries of truth, while systems determine the mechanisms of dissemination, legitimacy, and acceptance of those truths.

Hasil penelitian ini sejalan dengan studi (Aswar et al., 2025) yang menunjukkan bahwa lembaga survei dapat berfungsi sebagai instrumen kekuasaan karena memproduksi pengetahuan politik yang memengaruhi persepsi publik. Temuan ini juga sejalan dengan (Qudratullah et al., 2025), yang memperlihatkan bahwa media dapat membentuk rezim

kebenaran tertentu dalam isu hukum dan keadilan, sehingga narasi dominan memperoleh legitimasi lebih besar daripada perspektif alternatif. Dalam konteks komunikasi digital, hasil penelitian ini mendukung analisis (Fuchs, 2016, 2020) yang menjelaskan bahwa kapitalisme digital dan kekuasaan algoritmik telah memperluas kolonisasi ruang publik melalui eksploitasi data, personalisasi informasi, dan pembentukan echo chamber. Namun, kebaruan artikel ini terletak pada upaya menyintesis Foucault dan Habermas secara dialogis: Foucault digunakan untuk membongkar bagaimana wacana bekerja sebagai mekanisme kekuasaan, sedangkan Habermas digunakan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana komunikasi masih dapat diarahkan pada kritik, dialog, dan emansipasi.

The main meaning of the results of this study is that communication should be read as a social practice that has ideological, political, and historical dimensions. Communication is not enough to be understood in terms of message, medium, or effect, but must also be seen from the power structure that allows a message to be produced, disseminated, received, and legitimized. In the Indonesian context, this interpretation is important because the practices of political communication, media reporting, digital regulation, and identity narratives often reveal the close relationship between language, power, and social legitimacy. Discourses on stability, development, nationalism, religion, democracy, and security can be used to build public consensus, but they can also serve to limit criticism, weaken opposition, or weed out alternative narratives. Thus, the results of this study expand the understanding that communication is not only a means of exchanging meaning, but also a battlefield to determine social truth.

Reflection on these findings suggests that communication has both function and dysfunction at the same time. The positive function of communication is seen when it opens up spaces for dialogue, strengthens public participation, builds critical awareness, and enables the emergence of counter-discourses to domination. This is in line with Habermas' idea that communication can be a means of emancipation if it is directed to communicative actions, common understanding, and rational discourse that is free from domination (Habermas, 1985a). However, communication also has dysfunction when used as a tool of normalization, manipulation, propaganda, polarization, and silencing criticism. In Foucault's framework, such dysfunction occurs because power works subtly through discourse, truth regimes, social categories, and normalization practices that make dominance seem natural and natural (Foucault, 1977, 2013).

An important implication of this reflection is the need to strengthen critical awareness in dealing with public communication, especially in the digital space. Social media and digital platforms do open up wider access to information, but at the same time they can amplify communication distortions through the spread of disinformation, content personalization, polarization, and the formation of echo chambers. Therefore, it is not enough for society to be just a recipient of information, but it needs to be a critical subject who is able to question the source, interests, power structures, and algorithmic mechanisms behind each discourse. In this case, critical communication theory is important because it offers a framework to dismantle dominance while encouraging more reflective, democratic, and emancipatory communication practices.

Based on the findings of this study, there are several strategic steps that need to be taken to strengthen more critical and democratic public communication. First, media literacy and digital literacy need to be strengthened so that the public is able to recognize communication distortions, discourse manipulation, disinformation, and power interests behind message production. Second, media institutions and digital platforms need to be encouraged to be more transparent in the process of producing, curating, moderating, and distributing information, especially those related to public, political, and state policy issues. Third, deliberative public space needs to be expanded through citizen forums, alternative media, academic communities, civil society organizations, and public participation channels that allow the emergence of counter-discourses in a healthy manner. Fourth, public communication policies need to be directed to protect freedom of expression, diversity of opinion, and equal access to information so that public spaces are not only controlled by the state, markets, political elites, mainstream media, or digital platform algorithms.

Thus, this discussion confirms that the Foucault-Habermas synthesis makes an important contribution to the development of critical communication studies. Foucault helps explain how power works in discourse, while Habermas helps show how communication can still be directed towards emancipation through rational discourse and deliberative public space. The synthesis of both shows that communication is a dual arena: it can be an instrument of domination, but it can also be a space for resistance and social change if supported by critical awareness, public literacy, media transparency, and a more inclusive and democratic communication structure.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that communication cannot be understood as a neutral process in delivering messages, but as an arena where discourse, power, knowledge, and social interests work with each other. The main findings of this study confirm that discourse plays a role in producing a regime of truth, shaping subjects, normalizing meaning, and determining the boundary between narratives that are considered legitimate and narratives that are eliminated. In addition, modern communication, particularly in digital public spaces, is distorted when communicative actions oriented towards mutual understanding are replaced by strategic actions controlled by political, economic, bureaucratic, media, and platform algorithmic interests. However, this study also found that communication still has emancipatory potential through critical awareness, the production of counter-discourse, public literacy, and the expansion of more inclusive and deliberative discourse spaces.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in the attempt to synthesize the thought of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas within the framework of critical communication theory. Foucault provides an analytical basis for understanding how power works through discourse, truth regimes, normalization, and subject formation, while Habermas provides a normative orientation for assessing the quality of communication based on rationality, equality of participation, and freedom from systemic distortions. The synthesis of both results in an understanding that communication is a dual arena: on the one hand it can be an instrument of domination, but on the other hand it can be a space for criticism, resistance, and social change.

Thus, this study expands the study of critical communication by offering an integrative approach to read the relationship between domination and emancipation in digital public spaces, especially in the context of Indonesian society.

However, this study has limitations because it uses a critical literature review design so that it has not tested the Foucault-Habermas synthesis in certain empirical cases directly. This study also does not present field data from digital communication practices, media reporting, political campaigns, civil society movements, or social media user interactions in Indonesia. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop empirical studies using critical discourse analysis, digital ethnography, media case studies, or conversation analysis on digital platforms so that the theoretical synthesis offered in this article can be tested, deepened, and contextualized more concretely in contemporary communication dynamics.

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