Algorithmic Storytelling and Market Power: Antitrust in the Age of Digital Orality

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Abstract: This article examines how algorithmic storytelling has emerged as a new form of market power in contemporary digital platform economies. As digital communication increasingly shifts from text-based interaction toward oral, performative, and narrative-driven media such as podcasts, livestreams, TikTok videos, and voice-based platforms, algorithms now play a decisive role in determining which stories become visible, viral, and economically valuable. Drawing on theories of digital orality, platform capitalism, media studies, and antitrust scholarship, the study argues that dominant digital platforms exercise power not only through data extraction and infrastructural control but also through the algorithmic organisation of narrative visibility and audience attention. Using qualitative and interdisciplinary analysis, the article critically examines how recommendation systems, amplification mechanisms, and behavioural targeting structures create anti-competitive advantages that reinforce market concentration, privilege dominant creators, and marginalise alternative voices. Through selected case studies involving podcast exclusivity, short-form video platforms, and influencer economies, the article demonstrates that storytelling has become a strategic economic asset within attention-driven digital markets. The study further argues that existing antitrust frameworks—largely grounded in price effects and consumer welfare standards—remain inadequate for addressing contemporary forms of communicative and discursive market power. In response, the article proposes a reconceptualisation of competition law that incorporates algorithmic visibility, attention control, and narrative dominance as central indicators of market concentration. Ultimately, the study contributes to emerging debates on digital regulation by demonstrating that, in increasingly algorithmic and oral communication economies, control over storytelling infrastructures increasingly constitutes control over markets themselves.
Keywords: Algorithmic Storytelling; Digital Orality; Market Power; Competition Law (Antitrust); Platform Governance

Résumé : Cet article examine comment la narration algorithmique a émergé comme une nouvelle forme de pouvoir de marché au sein des économies de plateformes numériques contemporaines. Alors que la communication numérique délaisse progressivement les interactions textuelles au profit de médias oraux, performatifs et narratifs - tels que les podcasts, les diffusions en direct, les vidéos TikTok et les plateformes vocales -, les algorithmes jouent désormais un rôle déterminant dans la visibilité, la viralité et la valeur économique des récits. En s'appuyant sur les théories de l'oralité numérique, du capitalisme de plateforme, des études médiatiques et du droit de la concurrence, cette étude soutient que les plateformes numériques dominantes exercent un pouvoir non seulement par l'extraction de données et le contrôle des infrastructures, mais aussi par l'organisation algorithmique de la visibilité narrative et de l'attention du public. À travers une analyse qualitative et interdisciplinaire, l'article examine de manière critique comment les systèmes de recommandation, les mécanismes d'amplification et les structures de ciblage comportemental engendrent des avantages anticoncurrentiels ; ces derniers renforcent la concentration du marché, favorisent les créateurs dominants et marginalisent les voix alternatives. En s'appuyant sur des études de cas portant sur l'exclusivité des podcasts, les plateformes de vidéos courtes et l'économie des influenceurs, l'article démontre que la narration est devenue un atout économique stratégique sur les marchés numériques fondés sur l'économie de l'attention. L'étude soutient en outre que les cadres actuels du droit de la concurrence - largement fondés sur les effets de prix et les critères de bien-être du consommateur - demeurent inadaptés pour appréhender les formes

contemporaines de pouvoir de marché communicationnel et discursif. En réponse, l'article propose une reconceptualisation du droit de la concurrence intégrant la visibilité algorithmique, le contrôle de l'attention et la domination narrative comme indicateurs centraux de la concentration du marché. Enfin, cette étude contribue aux débats émergents sur la régulation numérique en démontrant que, dans des économies de la communication de plus en plus algorithmiques et orales, le contrôle des infrastructures narratives équivaut de plus en plus à un contrôle des marchés eux-mêmes.
Mots-clés : Narration algorithmique ; Oralité numérique ; Pouvoir de marché ; Droit de la concurrence (Antitrust) ; Gouvernance des plateformes

Introduction

The rapid transformation of global communication technologies has fundamentally altered how human beings produce, circulate, and consume knowledge in the digital age. Contemporary societies are increasingly witnessing the emergence of what scholars describe as “digital orality,” a technologically mediated communicative environment in which speech, audiovisual narration, livestreaming, podcasts, and performative storytelling increasingly dominate public discourse (Ong, 1982; Couldry, 2012). Unlike earlier internet cultures that privileged text-based interaction through blogs, websites, and static digital archives, contemporary digital platforms are increasingly organized around algorithmically amplified narratives designed to maximize emotional engagement, virality, and user retention. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Spotify, podcasts, livestreaming applications, and AI-driven recommendation systems have transformed storytelling into one of the most powerful currencies within digital economies. In this evolving media ecology, narratives no longer merely communicate information; they shape attention, influence public perception, determine market visibility, and generate economic value within highly competitive platform environments.

This transformation reflects a broader historical shift from text-based information economies toward narrative-driven platform capitalism. Earlier digital economies largely depended on searchable databases, hyperlinks, and the circulation of textual content. However, the contemporary digital landscape increasingly privileges emotionally compelling, performative, and algorithmically curated storytelling that sustains user engagement across fragmented attention economies (van Dijck, 2013). Recommendation systems on digital platforms now determine which voices become visible, which stories trend globally, and which creators achieve economic success. Algorithms actively prioritize particular forms of narration, humour, outrage, aesthetics, and emotional resonance because such content maximizes user interaction and advertising profitability. Consequently, storytelling itself has become deeply intertwined with the extraction of economic value within digital capitalism. As Srnicek (2017) argues, platforms function not merely as passive communication infrastructures but as economic systems designed to capture, organize, and monetize data, visibility, and behavioural prediction. Within this context, algorithmic storytelling emerges as both a communicative and an economic mechanism through which digital corporations simultaneously shape market competition and public culture.

The rise of digital orality also represents a significant transformation in the political economy of communication. Historically, mass media institutions such as newspapers, radio stations, and television networks exerted substantial influence through editorial control and centralised gatekeeping. Contemporary digital platforms, however, exercise power less through direct editorial intervention and more through algorithmic governance systems that invisibly organize visibility, circulation, and discoverability (Gillespie, 2018). Recommendation algorithms determine which podcasts appear in users' feeds, which TikTok stories go viral, and which political narratives receive algorithmic amplification. These processes are neither neutral nor purely technological; rather, they constitute forms of infrastructural power embedded within platform capitalism. Zuboff (2019) observes that surveillance capitalism increasingly depends upon the capacity of digital corporations to predict, modify, and influence human behaviour through data-driven systems of behavioural extraction and algorithmic targeting. In this sense, algorithms do not merely distribute stories; they actively shape cultural relevance, political discourse, and economic opportunity by controlling the visibility of narratives within digital environments. The ability to govern narrative circulation, therefore, constitutes an emerging form of market power that extends beyond traditional economic understandings of monopoly and competition.

Despite the growing significance of algorithmic governance within digital economies, contemporary antitrust frameworks remain largely rooted in industrial-era assumptions concerning price manipulation, market concentration, and consumer welfare. Traditional antitrust law developed primarily to regulate monopolistic practices in railroads, oil corporations, manufacturing industries, and, later, telecommunications giants (Wu, 2018). These frameworks were largely designed to address visible forms of economic dominance, such as pricing structures, mergers, exclusive contracts, and barriers to market entry. However, digital platforms increasingly exercise dominance through control of communication infrastructures, algorithmic recommendation systems, audience attention, and narrative visibility rather than solely through conventional pricing mechanisms (Khan, 2017). The central problem is therefore that existing antitrust frameworks often fail to adequately conceptualize algorithmic storytelling and visibility control as forms of market power. While scholars have extensively examined issues such as data monopolies, surveillance capitalism, and platform governance, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the role of narrative amplification and algorithmic storytelling in sustaining digital market dominance. This represents a significant scholarly and regulatory gap because visibility itself increasingly determines economic success, political influence, and cultural legitimacy within platform economies.

This article argues that algorithmic storytelling constitutes a new form of market power in which digital platforms govern competition through the strategic organisation of narrative visibility, affective engagement, and communicative amplification. Drawing on digital media theory, platform studies, political economy, communication theory, and contemporary antitrust scholarship, the article examines how dominant digital corporations increasingly shape markets by controlling the infrastructures through which stories circulate and audiences engage with digital content. The central research question guiding this study is: How does algorithmic storytelling constitute a new form of market power in digital platforms? The article contends that market dominance in the digital age is no longer exercised exclusively through ownership of material infrastructure or control of pricing systems but increasingly through the algorithmic management of attention, storytelling, and public visibility. By foregrounding the relationship among digital orality, algorithmic governance, and platform capitalism, this study seeks to contribute to emerging debates about the need to rethink antitrust law in contemporary communication economies, where narrative circulation itself has become a central site of economic and political power.

1. Literature Review

Scholarship on digital communication and platform economies has increasingly emphasized the transformation of contemporary media systems through algorithmic governance, data extraction, and digital platform capitalism. Early studies of digital media largely focused on the democratizing potential of the internet, particularly its capacity to decentralize communication and expand public participation (Castells, 2012). However, more recent scholarship has challenged this optimistic perspective by demonstrating how digital platforms have evolved into highly concentrated economic systems dominated by a small number of global corporations. Scholars such as Srnicek (2017), Gillespie (2018), and Zuboff (2019) argue that platforms such as Google, Meta, TikTok, and Amazon increasingly exercise power through algorithmic infrastructures that govern visibility, recommendation, and audience engagement. Within this framework, algorithms function not merely as technological tools but as mechanisms of economic and cultural control that shape public discourse, consumer behaviour, and market competition. Khan (2017) further demonstrates that traditional antitrust models grounded in price-based consumer welfare standards are insufficient for addressing contemporary forms of platform dominance rooted in data accumulation, infrastructural control, and network effects. Although these studies provide important insights into digital capitalism, they generally focus on data monopolies and surveillance economies while paying comparatively limited attention to storytelling and narrative circulation as emerging dimensions of market power.

At the same time, scholars of media and communication studies have increasingly explored the rise of digital orality and the transformation of online communication into narrative-driven, performative, and audiovisual forms of expression. Drawing on Ong's (1982) theory of secondary orality, researchers argue that digital media environments increasingly privilege speech, performance, immediacy, and participatory narration over static textual communication. Platforms such as TikTok, podcasts, livestreams, and short-form video applications have accelerated the emergence of what Couldry (2012) describes as media practices organized around visibility, performativity, and affective engagement. van Dijck (2013) similarly argues that contemporary social media ecosystems are structured through algorithmic cultures that shape both social interaction and cultural production. Within African contexts, scholars such as Nyamnjoh (2005) and Bosch (2017) demonstrate that digital platforms have also transformed oral political cultures by enabling new forms of participatory communication, digital activism, and youth engagement. African digital cultures increasingly combine indigenous oral traditions, humour, performance, music, and storytelling with algorithmically mediated social media practices. However, much of the existing scholarship on digital orality focuses primarily on political participation, digital activism, or online identity formation without adequately interrogating the economic implications of algorithmic storytelling within platform capitalism.

Emerging scholarship on platform governance and algorithmic visibility has begun to examine how narrative amplification itself functions as a form of infrastructural power. Gillespie (2018) argues that platform moderation and recommendation systems determine not only what users consume but also what becomes culturally legitimate and publicly visible within digital environments. Similarly, Beer (2017) contends that algorithms increasingly shape contemporary social reality by organizing attention, popularity, and relevance according to opaque computational logics. These processes are particularly significant in narrative-driven economies, where virality and visibility directly influence profitability, creator monetization, political influence, and market competition. African scholars such as Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019) further observe that digital platforms increasingly mediate cultural authority and public discourse within African societies through algorithmic prioritization systems that privilege certain narratives, aesthetics, and forms of engagement over others. Nevertheless, current scholarship remains fragmented, with antitrust studies rarely engaging communication theory and digital orality scholarship seldom examining questions of market concentration and economic power. This separation has produced an important theoretical gap in understanding how algorithmic storytelling operates simultaneously as a communicative, cultural, and economic phenomenon.

This article seeks to address this gap by bringing together scholarship on digital media studies, platform capitalism, antitrust theory, political economy, and African digital studies to conceptualize algorithmic storytelling as a contemporary form of market power. Unlike existing studies that focus primarily on data extraction or surveillance, this study foregrounds narrative visibility, communicative amplification, and algorithmic recommendation as central mechanisms through which dominant platforms shape digital markets. The article argues that contemporary market dominance increasingly depends upon the capacity of digital corporations to organize storytelling infrastructures, regulate attention economies, and control the circulation of narratives within digital public spheres. By integrating Western scholarship on platform capitalism with African perspectives on digital orality and participatory communication, the study contributes to emerging debates on the need to rethink antitrust frameworks within contemporary communication economies characterized by algorithmic visibility, performative media cultures, and digitally mediated oral storytelling.

2. Conceptual Foundations: Orality in the Digital Age

The study of orality has long occupied a central position within communication theory, folklore studies, media studies, and cultural anthropology because of its importance in understanding how human societies produce, transmit, and preserve knowledge. Early scholarship on orality and literacy examined the distinctions between oral cultures and literate societies, emphasizing how modes of communication shape cognition, social organization, memory, and cultural authority (Goody, 1987; Ong, 1982). In oral societies, communication is typically performative, communal, participatory, and dependent upon memory, repetition, and social interaction rather than textual permanence. Oral expression, therefore, functions not merely as a means of transmitting information but also as a cultural process through which communities negotiate identity, authority, and collective consciousness. Scholars such as Finnegan (2012) and Okpewho (1992) further demonstrate that oral traditions possess complex narrative structures and sophisticated communicative systems that challenge earlier assumptions that literacy necessarily represents a superior mode of knowledge production. Within African societies in particular, oral performance, storytelling, praise poetry, songs, and communal narration have historically constituted central mechanisms through which knowledge, values, and political legitimacy are circulated across generations.

African scholars have similarly emphasised the centrality of orality within the production of cultural identity, political consciousness, and communal memory. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), for example, argues that language and oral expression constitute critical sites of resistance against cultural domination and epistemic colonisation. Likewise, Falola (2018) observes that African oral traditions are not static cultural remnants but dynamic systems of knowledge production continually adapting to changing historical and technological environments. Contemporary digital platforms, therefore, represent not simply technological spaces but contested arenas in which African storytelling traditions encounter global systems of algorithmic governance and platform capitalism. These tensions raise important questions concerning digital cultural sovereignty, narrative visibility, and the ownership of communicative infrastructures within increasingly globalised media ecologies.

Among the most influential theorists of orality is Walter J. Ong (1982), whose concept of “secondary orality” remains foundational for understanding contemporary digital communication. Ong argues that electronic media such as radio and television generated a new form of technologically mediated orality that differed from traditional oral cultures while simultaneously recovering certain oral characteristics. Unlike primary orality, which exists independently of writing, secondary orality emerges within technologically advanced societies and depends upon electronic communication infrastructures. Contemporary digital platforms intensify this phenomenon by combining audiovisual immediacy, participatory interaction, and algorithmically mediated communication within global digital environments. Platforms such as TikTok, podcasts, livestreams, voice notes, and short-form video applications increasingly privilege speech, performance, storytelling, humour, and emotional narration over static textual communication. As Couldry (2012) and van Dijck (2013) observe, contemporary media cultures are increasingly organized around visibility, performativity, and affective engagement, thereby transforming digital communication into a dynamic ecosystem of narrative circulation and participatory storytelling. Digital orality, therefore, represents not simply a technological development but a profound transformation in the ways narratives are produced, consumed, and economically valorized within platform capitalism.

The transition from traditional oral cultures to digital orality also reveals important continuities in the social functions of storytelling. Historically, oral traditions depended on communal participation, emotional resonance, repetition, and performative interaction to sustain audience engagement and collective memory (Bauman, 1984). Contemporary digital platforms reproduce many of these same characteristics through algorithmically amplified systems of virality and participatory communication. TikTok storytelling, podcasts, reaction videos, livestream discussions, and voice-driven social media interactions all privilege immediacy, emotional persuasion, and audience participation. Unlike traditional textual media that often emphasize analytical distance and permanence, digital oral communication operates through speed, emotional responsiveness, and continuous interaction between creators and audiences. Algorithms further intensify these dynamics by privileging content capable of generating affective engagement, outrage, humour, intimacy, and emotional identification because such content sustains user attention and advertising profitability (Beer, 2017). Consequently, storytelling within digital environments increasingly functions both as a communicative practice and as an economic mechanism through which platforms organize visibility, influence consumer behaviour, and shape cultural relevance.

The participatory nature of digital orality further complicates traditional distinctions between producers and consumers, speakers and audiences, or broadcasters and listeners. Jenkins (2006) argues that digital media environments facilitate participatory cultures in which users actively create, remix, circulate, and reinterpret narratives across interconnected digital networks. This participatory structure has profound implications for understanding power in digital communication economies, as platforms no longer merely distribute information; they govern the circulation and amplification of stories through opaque recommendation systems and algorithmic infrastructures. Nyamnjoh (2005) similarly observes that African communicative cultures have historically emphasized fluidity, participation, and relational interaction, characteristics that resonate strongly with contemporary digital oral practices. However, while digital orality appears to democratize storytelling by expanding participation, algorithmic systems simultaneously concentrate visibility and economic power within dominant platforms that regulate which narratives become discoverable, viral, or commercially profitable. Understanding digital orality is therefore essential for analysing the relationship between storytelling, platform capitalism, and emerging forms of algorithmic market power in contemporary digital economies.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary research approach situated at the intersection of media studies, communication theory, digital sociology, folklore studies, and antitrust scholarship. The research is primarily theoretical and analytical, focusing on how algorithmic storytelling functions as a contemporary mechanism of market power within platform economies. Rather than relying solely on quantitative market metrics, the study employs critical discourse analysis and interpretive textual analysis to examine the relationship between digital orality, narrative visibility, algorithmic amplification, and platform dominance. This interdisciplinary approach is particularly necessary because contemporary digital platforms operate simultaneously as economic infrastructures, communicative systems, and cultural environments.

The article draws on purposively selected digital case studies involving podcast platforms, short-form video applications, influencer economies, and algorithmically curated social media ecosystems. These case studies were selected because they illustrate emerging forms of communicative concentration in which visibility, recommendation systems, and narrative amplification directly shape economic competitiveness and audience reach. Examples involving Spotify podcast exclusivity, TikTok’s “For You” recommendation system, YouTube influencer visibility, and algorithmic content moderation provide insight into how digital platforms structure market power through storytelling infrastructures. The study further engages contemporary scholarship on platform capitalism, surveillance capitalism, digital orality, and algorithmic governance in order to analyse how recommendation systems shape public discourse and communicative participation.

Methodologically, the article combines thematic analysis with critical political economy approaches to interrogate the cultural and economic implications of algorithmic visibility. Particular attention is paid to how algorithms influence discoverability, shape audience attention, reinforce network effects, and create barriers to entry for independent creators and smaller firms. The study does not seek to provide an empirical measurement of algorithmic systems but rather to develop a conceptual framework that explains how narrative circulation increasingly functions as a source of market dominance within digital communication economies. In doing so, the article contributes to emerging interdisciplinary debates concerning the relationship between communication, culture, technology, and competition law in the age of digital orality.

4. Algorithmic Storytelling as Infrastructure

Algorithmic storytelling refers to the technologically mediated organisation, prioritisation, and circulation of narratives through computational systems that determine how digital content is distributed, amplified, and consumed within platform environments. Unlike traditional storytelling, which depended primarily on human editors, broadcasters, publishers, or communal oral transmission, algorithmic storytelling operates through automated recommendation systems driven by data analytics, machine learning, and behavioural prediction models (Gillespie, 2018). In contemporary digital ecosystems, algorithms do not merely organise information neutrally; they actively shape narrative visibility by selecting which stories appear on users' feeds, which creators gain prominence, and which forms of communication achieve virality. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and podcast recommendation systems increasingly serve as infrastructures of narrative distribution, shaping public attention and cultural relevance. As Beer (2017) argues, algorithms possess significant social power because they regulate visibility, relevance, and discoverability within digitally mediated environments. Consequently, storytelling in the digital age is inseparable from the algorithmic systems that govern the circulation of communication and audience engagement.

One of the central functions of algorithmic storytelling is its ability to control content visibility within highly competitive attention economies. Digital platforms rely upon recommendation algorithms that continuously evaluate user behaviour, viewing patterns, emotional responses, and engagement metrics in order to determine which content receives algorithmic amplification (Zuboff, 2019). Visibility is therefore no longer determined primarily by editorial judgement or chronological publication but increasingly by algorithmic calculations designed to maximise user retention and advertising profitability. Content capable of generating emotional intensity, outrage, humour, intimacy, controversy, or participatory interaction is often prioritised because such narratives sustain prolonged engagement and increase platform monetisation. Gillespie (2018) observes that these recommendation systems effectively function as invisible curators of public discourse, shaping what users encounter and what remains obscured in digital environments. In this sense, algorithms become powerful gatekeepers of narrative circulation, capable of influencing not only cultural trends but also economic success, political influence, and public legitimacy. Creators, influencers, journalists, musicians, and political actors increasingly compete not simply for audiences but for algorithmic visibility itself.

Algorithmic storytelling also operates through processes of virality and amplification that transform digital narratives into economically valuable commodities. Virality refers to the rapid circulation of content across interconnected digital networks through shares, reposts, reactions, recommendations, and algorithmic promotion. However, virality is not entirely spontaneous; rather, it is heavily shaped by computational systems that privilege specific forms of engagement and emotional responsiveness (van Dijck, 2013). Platforms strategically amplify narratives that sustain continuous interaction because user engagement directly translates into advertising revenue, data extraction, and behavioural prediction opportunities. As Srnicek (2017) argues, platform capitalism fundamentally depends upon the commodification of attention and participation within digital ecosystems. This process transforms storytelling into a market mechanism through which platforms generate economic value while simultaneously shaping public consciousness. Algorithms therefore function not merely as technological infrastructures but as economic systems that regulate the circulation of visibility, influence, and affect within digital markets. The power to amplify particular narratives while marginalising others constitutes a significant form of communicative and economic control within contemporary platform economies.

Audience targeting further intensifies the infrastructural power of algorithmic storytelling by enabling platforms to personalise narratives according to users' behavioural profiles, emotional tendencies, political interests, and consumption habits. Through extensive data collection and predictive analytics, platforms construct highly individualised narrative environments designed to maximise engagement and behavioural influence (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). These systems create what scholars increasingly describe as "attention markets", in which human attention becomes a commodified economic resource bought, sold, and algorithmically managed within digital capitalism (Wu, 2016). In attention markets, visibility itself acquires economic value because audience engagement directly determines advertising revenue, creator monetisation, and platform profitability. Platforms therefore function as curators of narrative ecosystems that regulate not only communication but also the conditions under which stories become economically and culturally significant. This infrastructural control over narrative visibility represents a profound transformation in contemporary market power because dominant digital corporations increasingly govern the circulation of stories, emotions, and public attention within global communication economies. Algorithmic storytelling thus emerges as a central mechanism through which digital platforms consolidate influence, organise cultural consumption, and sustain monopolistic forms of power in the age of digital orality.

4.1 Market Power Beyond Price: Rethinking Antitrust

Traditional antitrust theory emerged primarily within industrial capitalist economies concerned with regulating monopolistic behaviour, protecting market competition, and safeguarding consumer welfare. Classical antitrust frameworks in the United States and Europe largely focused on measurable economic indicators such as price manipulation, market concentration, reduced output, and barriers to entry (Bork, 1978). The dominant "consumer welfare" paradigm, which has significantly shaped modern antitrust jurisprudence, assumes that market harm occurs primarily when monopolistic firms raise prices, restrict consumer choice, or reduce productive efficiency. Within this framework, competition law has historically been designed to prevent corporations from abusing market dominance by distorting pricing systems or excluding competitors from traditional markets (Hovenkamp, 2011). Such approaches were highly relevant in industrial sectors such as railroads, oil, manufacturing, and telecommunications, where economic power was closely tied to ownership of physical infrastructure and direct control over commodity pricing. However, the rise of digital platform economies increasingly exposes the limitations of conventional antitrust models, as many contemporary digital services operate under fundamentally different economic logics.

One of the central challenges confronting contemporary antitrust theory is the emergence of zero-priced digital services, which complicate traditional understandings of market harm and consumer welfare. Platforms such as Google, Meta, TikTok, and YouTube often provide services without direct monetary charges to users while simultaneously generating enormous profits through advertising, data extraction, and behavioural prediction systems. As Khan (2017) argues in her influential critique of digital monopolies, the consumer welfare model becomes inadequate when services appear "free" despite extensive market power accumulation through data concentration and infrastructural dominance. In digital economies, users frequently “pay” not through money but through attention, personal data, behavioural information, and continuous engagement. Srnicek (2017) similarly observes that platform capitalism depends upon the extraction and commodification of user activity as an economic resource. Consequently, market dominance in digital environments increasingly operates through control over communication infrastructures, algorithmic visibility, and data ecosystems rather than through traditional price manipulation alone. Antitrust law, therefore, faces growing difficulty in identifying and regulating monopolistic practices within economies where attention, behavioural prediction, and algorithmic recommendation constitute primary sources of economic value.

The limitations of traditional antitrust frameworks become even more apparent when examining the role of narrative visibility and algorithmic persuasion within contemporary platform economies. Digital corporations increasingly exercise what may be described as “discursive market power”, namely the capacity to shape public perception, influence cultural relevance, and regulate the circulation of narratives through algorithmic systems. Unlike conventional monopolistic power rooted solely in pricing control, discursive market power operates through the strategic organisation of visibility, amplification, and communicative influence. Recommendation algorithms determine which stories trend globally, which political narratives gain prominence, which creators become commercially successful, and which forms of expression remain marginalised within digital ecosystems (Gillespie, 2018). Platforms, therefore, function not merely as neutral intermediaries but as active curators of narrative environments capable of shaping consumer behaviour, public opinion, and cultural legitimacy. Zuboff (2019) argues that surveillance capitalism increasingly depends upon behavioural modification systems designed to predict and influence human actions through data-driven architectures of persuasion. In this context, control over narratives becomes inseparable from economic power because visibility itself determines advertising revenue, creator monetisation, political influence, and market competitiveness within attention-driven economies.

The emergence of discursive market power also intersects significantly with developments in behavioural economics and theories of persuasion. Behavioural economists such as Thaler and Sunstein (2008) demonstrate that human decision-making is profoundly shaped by cognitive biases, emotional framing, social influence, and environmental “choice architectures.” Digital platforms exploit these behavioural tendencies through algorithmic recommendation systems specifically designed to maximise engagement, emotional responsiveness, and prolonged user interaction. Algorithms continuously optimise narrative presentation by analysing behavioural data, emotional reactions, viewing habits, and engagement metrics in order to influence consumer choices and sustain platform dependency. Sunstein (2017) further argues that digital communication environments increasingly produce “information cocoons” and fragmented attention structures in which users encounter algorithmically curated realities tailored to behavioural prediction models. Within such systems, persuasion itself becomes an economic infrastructure through which digital corporations influence not only consumption patterns but also political attitudes, cultural preferences, and social consciousness. Antitrust debates must therefore move beyond narrow concerns with pricing and output toward broader analyses of communicative power, algorithmic persuasion, and narrative control within digital platform economies. Rethinking antitrust in the age of digital orality requires recognising that contemporary market dominance increasingly depends upon the capacity to govern visibility, shape attention, and organise the circulation of stories within algorithmically mediated public spheres.

4.2. African Competition Law Perspectives

While much of the contemporary literature on digital market regulation has been shaped by North American and European antitrust scholarship, African competition authorities have increasingly recognised that digital platforms present distinctive regulatory challenges that extend beyond conventional price-based market analysis. The South African Competition Commission, through its Online Intermediation Platforms Market Inquiry (2023), has demonstrated how dominant digital platforms may distort market access by privileging certain sellers, controlling visibility rankings, and reinforcing structural inequalities within digital ecosystems. Similarly, the Competition Commission has argued that algorithmic ranking systems, search prominence, and platform self-preferencing may undermine fair competition even where consumer prices remain unaffected.

These developments resonate strongly with the present study's argument that algorithmic storytelling constitutes a new form of market power. In African digital environments, where independent creators, local languages, and indigenous knowledge systems already face structural disadvantages, algorithmic visibility becomes a critical determinant of cultural participation and economic opportunity. Consequently, African competition policy should increasingly evaluate digital dominance not only through traditional indicators such as market share and pricing behaviour but also through algorithmic visibility, narrative exclusion, linguistic marginalisation, and unequal access to digital audiences. Such an approach would better reflect the realities of African platform economies, where cultural diversity and communicative inclusion are themselves essential dimensions of competitive markets.

4.3. Mechanisms of Anti-Competitive Advantage

One of the most significant mechanisms through which digital platforms consolidate anti-competitive advantage is algorithmic amplification bias. Although digital corporations frequently present algorithms as neutral and objective systems of content organisation, scholars increasingly demonstrate that recommendation systems privilege particular forms of content, creators, and narratives according to commercial priorities embedded within platform architectures (Beer, 2017; Gillespie, 2018). Algorithms systematically prioritise content capable of generating prolonged engagement, emotional intensity, controversy, and virality because such interactions maximise advertising revenue and data extraction opportunities. Consequently, storytelling visibility within digital environments is unevenly distributed according to algorithmic logics that favour already dominant creators, institutional actors, and commercially profitable narratives. This creates a self-reinforcing hierarchy of visibility in which algorithmic amplification continuously reproduces existing concentrations of communicative power. As Noble (2018) argues, algorithmic systems are never socially neutral because they reflect broader economic and ideological structures embedded within digital infrastructures. In narrative-driven economies, algorithmic amplification therefore functions as a powerful mechanism of market control by determining which voices become discoverable and which remain marginalised within digital public spheres.

Closely connected to amplification bias are network effects driven by narrative virality. Network effects occur when the value and dominance of a platform increase as more users participate within its ecosystem, thereby creating conditions that make market competition increasingly difficult for smaller or emerging platforms (Srnicek, 2017). In the context of digital storytelling, virality intensifies these network effects by attracting additional users, engagement, creators, advertisers, and economic investment. Platforms such as TikTok and YouTube derive substantial competitive advantage from their ability to sustain continuous cycles of viral narrative circulation through algorithmically optimised recommendation systems. Viral storytelling not only increases platform profitability but also reinforces audience dependency upon dominant digital ecosystems where visibility and cultural relevance are concentrated. van Dijck (2013) observes that social media platforms strategically engineer participation and connectivity in ways that transform user interaction into mechanisms of economic accumulation. Consequently, network effects in digital storytelling economies extend beyond technological infrastructure to include cultural influence, audience attention, and narrative dominance. The more a platform controls the dynamics of viral storytelling, the more difficult it becomes for competing platforms or independent creators to challenge its market position.

Data monopolies and algorithmic feedback loops further entrench anti-competitive power within contemporary platform economies. Digital corporations accumulate enormous quantities of behavioural data through user interactions, viewing patterns, engagement metrics, search histories, and emotional responses. This extensive data extraction enables platforms to continuously refine recommendation systems and predictive algorithms, thereby strengthening their competitive dominance (Zuboff, 2019). Data monopolies generate powerful feedback loops because larger platforms have greater capacity to collect user data, improve algorithmic precision, attract advertisers, and enhance user retention, thereby reinforcing their market dominance over smaller competitors. As Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue, data colonialism represents a new phase of capitalist accumulation in which human experience itself becomes appropriated as a raw material for economic exploitation. In storytelling economies, these feedback loops enable dominant platforms to optimise narrative visibility with extraordinary precision, predicting which stories are most likely to generate engagement, virality, and monetisable attention. The result is an increasingly concentrated communication environment in which algorithmic infrastructures and data ownership mutually reinforce market power.

Another critical mechanism of anti-competitive advantage is platform self-preferencing, whereby digital corporations prioritise their own content, commercial interests, or preferred creators within recommendation systems and search visibility structures. Self-preferencing occurs when platforms manipulate algorithmic rankings to privilege affiliated services, sponsored content, or platform-generated media at the expense of independent creators and competitors (Khan, 2017). In digital storytelling ecosystems, self-preferencing may involve promoting platform-sponsored podcasts, prioritising monetised creators, amplifying commercially valuable narratives, or suppressing content perceived as economically or politically undesirable. Such practices undermine fair competition because dominant platforms simultaneously operate as infrastructure providers, market regulators, content distributors, and economic competitors. Creators increasingly depend on opaque algorithmic systems whose criteria for visibility remain inaccessible and are continually changing. This concentration of infrastructural and discursive power enables platforms to shape not only market outcomes but also cultural production and public discourse. Gillespie (2018) therefore argues that digital platforms increasingly function as custodians of visibility capable of determining the conditions under which narratives become economically sustainable and culturally legitimate.

These anti-competitive dynamics collectively create substantial barriers to entry for new creators, smaller platforms, and independent storytellers. In traditional media systems, barriers to entry often involved access to printing presses, broadcasting infrastructure, or financial capital. In contemporary digital economies, however, barriers increasingly emerge through algorithmic opacity, data asymmetry, visibility inequality, and audience concentration. New creators may technically possess access to digital publishing tools, yet they remain structurally disadvantaged within environments where discoverability is controlled by proprietary recommendation systems optimised to favour already established actors. Wu (2018) argues that concentrated digital markets produce forms of infrastructural dependency in which dominant corporations effectively govern the conditions of participation within communication economies. Emerging creators therefore compete not only for audiences but also for algorithmic recognition within highly saturated visibility markets. This creates a paradoxical digital environment in which platforms appear democratised and participatory while simultaneously reproducing highly centralised forms of communicative and economic control. The concentration of algorithmic storytelling power thus poses a significant challenge for contemporary antitrust theory, as market dominance increasingly operates through visibility governance, narrative amplification, and infrastructural control over digital orality.

5. Case Studies

The consolidation of power within podcasting platforms provides one of the clearest examples of how algorithmic storytelling shapes market dominance in contemporary digital economies. Over the past decade, podcasting evolved from a relatively decentralised medium associated with open distribution systems into a highly commercialised platform economy increasingly dominated by a few major corporations. Spotify’s aggressive acquisition strategy, including exclusive licensing agreements with high-profile podcasters such as Joe Rogan and Alex Cooper, illustrates how digital platforms utilise exclusivity and algorithmic promotion to consolidate narrative visibility and audience concentration. These exclusive arrangements not only increase subscribers' dependence on a single platform but also enable Spotify to shape recommendation systems, advertising markets, and podcast discoverability (Sullivan, 2022). Independent podcasters frequently struggle to achieve visibility within algorithmically curated environments where platform-backed content receives preferential promotion through homepage placement, automated recommendations, and advertising integration. The issue extends beyond economic competition to broader questions of communicative power, as dominant platforms increasingly determine which voices, perspectives, and narratives gain prominence in public discourse. As Morris and Patterson (2015) argue, podcasting’s early democratic ethos of open participation has gradually been absorbed into platform capitalism, where algorithmic visibility and infrastructural control shape narrative circulation in line with commercial priorities rather than communicative diversity.

Short-form video platforms similarly demonstrate how algorithmic storytelling structures cultural visibility and competitive advantage through highly personalised recommendation systems. TikTok, in particular, has transformed digital storytelling through its “For You” algorithm, which curates personalised streams of short-form audiovisual narratives based on behavioural prediction, emotional responsiveness, and engagement metrics. While TikTok is often celebrated for democratising content creation by enabling ordinary users to achieve viral visibility, scholars increasingly note that its recommendation systems privilege specific aesthetic styles, emotional registers, and commercially valuable forms of storytelling (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2021). Viral trends, political discourse, humour, and influencer culture are amplified according to algorithmic calculations optimised for engagement rather than communicative plurality. This produces what Cotter (2019) describes as “algorithmic visibility”, whereby creators must strategically adapt their storytelling practices to the opaque demands of platform recommendation systems in order to remain discoverable. Furthermore, allegations concerning shadow banning, selective amplification, and politically sensitive moderation reveal how algorithmic infrastructures can invisibly regulate narrative circulation within digital public spheres. In many cases, creators from marginalised communities, smaller linguistic groups, or politically sensitive contexts encounter structural disadvantages because platform algorithms disproportionately favour already dominant trends, mainstream aesthetics, and commercially profitable narratives. Consequently, short-form video platforms function not merely as neutral communication tools but as infrastructures that actively shape cultural production and market competition.

The rise of influencer economies further demonstrates how algorithmic favouritism produces new forms of anti-competitive advantage within digital storytelling markets. Influencers operate within highly competitive visibility economies where algorithmic amplification directly determines economic sustainability, sponsorship opportunities, and audience growth. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube reward creators who generate sustained engagement, high watch time, and continuous interaction, thereby reinforcing systems of algorithmic stratification. As Abidin (2018) argues, influencer cultures are deeply shaped by platform architectures that commodify intimacy, authenticity, and emotional performance as marketable digital labour. However, these economies are characterised by profound inequalities because recommendation systems often privilege creators with existing visibility, advertising partnerships, or platform support. This creates cumulative advantage structures in which already successful influencers gain greater algorithmic amplification, thereby attracting additional sponsorships, followers, and visibility opportunities. Independent creators frequently describe the instability and opacity of these systems, where sudden algorithmic changes can dramatically reduce reach, monetisation, and audience engagement without transparency or accountability. Such conditions reinforce what Gillespie (2018) terms the “custodial” power of platforms, whereby corporations exercise substantial influence over the economic viability of digital storytelling while simultaneously avoiding responsibility for their role in shaping communicative hierarchies.

The impact of these platform dynamics on independent creators and smaller firms is particularly significant because algorithmic concentration increasingly produces structural barriers to market entry within digital communication economies. Although digital platforms initially appeared to lower entry barriers by providing accessible publishing tools, contemporary platform ecosystems increasingly favour large corporations, established creators, and platform-affiliated content producers. Independent media firms, small podcast networks, emerging storytellers, and local creators often struggle to compete against platform-owned infrastructures capable of controlling recommendation systems, advertising integration, and audience data analytics. African digital creators, for example, frequently encounter additional disadvantages linked to linguistic marginalisation, infrastructural inequality, and limited algorithmic prioritisation within global platform economies dominated by Western commercial interests (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019). Smaller firms also lack access to the extensive behavioural data and advertising networks that enable dominant platforms to optimise audience targeting and narrative amplification. The result is a communication environment increasingly characterised by concentrated narrative visibility, algorithmic dependency, and infrastructural inequality. These case studies, therefore, demonstrate that algorithmic storytelling constitutes far more than a technological feature of digital platforms; it represents a central mechanism through which market dominance, communicative control, and economic power are organised within contemporary digital orality.

5.1. Cultural and Ethical Implications

The rise of algorithmically driven digital platforms has profoundly transformed storytelling into a commodified economic resource within contemporary communication economies. Historically, storytelling functioned primarily as a cultural and communal practice through which societies transmitted memory, identity, morality, spirituality, and collective experience across generations (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1992). In many African societies, oral traditions such as folktales, praise poetry, communal songs, and storytelling rituals operated within participatory social frameworks that emphasised collective engagement and cultural continuity rather than commercial profitability. However, within digital platform economies, storytelling is increasingly organised according to metrics of monetisation, engagement, virality, and algorithmic visibility. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, podcasts, and influencer networks transform narratives into market commodities whose economic value depends upon user retention, advertising integration, and data extraction (Srnicek, 2017). This commodification fundamentally alters the social meaning of storytelling because narratives are increasingly shaped by commercial imperatives designed to maximise visibility and platform profitability. As Zuboff (2019) argues, surveillance capitalism converts human experience itself into extractable behavioural data, thereby transforming cultural expression into a source of economic accumulation. In this context, storytelling ceases to function solely as cultural communication and increasingly becomes an instrument of algorithmically mediated market production.

One of the most significant cultural consequences of algorithmic storytelling is the homogenisation of narratives through systems of algorithmic preference and optimisation. Recommendation algorithms privilege content capable of generating emotional intensity, rapid engagement, humour, outrage, spectacle, and virality because such narratives sustain user attention and increase advertising revenue (Beer, 2017). Consequently, creators are often compelled to adapt their storytelling practices to the behavioural demands of platform algorithms rather than to the cultural or artistic integrity of their narratives. This process encourages the repetition of dominant storytelling formats, aesthetic styles, linguistic patterns, and performative conventions that align with platform visibility logics. For example, short-form video platforms frequently reward highly condensed, emotionally charged, and visually stimulating narratives, thereby discouraging slower, reflective, or culturally nuanced forms of storytelling. van Dijck (2013) observes that social media architectures systematically shape communicative behaviour by privileging specific forms of interaction and visibility. The result is an increasingly standardised digital storytelling environment in which algorithmic optimisation narrows narrative diversity and amplifies commercially profitable modes of expression. Such conditions raise profound ethical concerns because cultural creativity becomes subordinated to algorithmic metrics that prioritise engagement over plurality, complexity, and cultural specificity.

Algorithmic storytelling also contributes to the marginalisation of alternative voices, minority cultures, and non-dominant communicative traditions within digital public spheres.

Although digital platforms are frequently celebrated for democratising communication and expanding participation, visibility within these environments remains deeply unequal. Recommendation systems often privilege dominant languages, mainstream aesthetics, commercially attractive creators, and globally marketable narratives while marginalising local cultures, indigenous storytelling forms, and politically sensitive perspectives (Noble, 2018). African creators, for example, frequently encounter structural disadvantages linked to linguistic marginalisation, limited monetisation opportunities, and algorithmic prioritisation favouring Euro-American cultural norms within global platform economies (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019). Similarly, indigenous storytelling traditions that depend upon communal participation, contextual performance, or culturally specific modes of transmission may struggle to conform to platform-driven formats optimised for speed, virality, and algorithmic discoverability. Noble (2018) further demonstrates that algorithmic systems frequently reproduce broader social inequalities by embedding racial, cultural, and ideological biases within computational infrastructures. Consequently, digital storytelling economies risk reinforcing cultural hierarchies in which certain voices and narratives become hyper-visible while others remain systematically obscured or excluded from algorithmic circulation.

The intersection between algorithmic storytelling and folklore traditions reveals particularly important ethical tensions concerning cultural preservation, authenticity, and digital appropriation. Oral traditions historically relied upon communal participation, performative interaction, memory, and contextual interpretation within specific cultural environments (Bauman, 1984). Digital platforms increasingly detach such traditions from their original social contexts by fragmenting, remixing, and commodifying them for viral circulation within global attention economies. Traditional songs, dances, proverbs, oral performances, and indigenous narratives are frequently transformed into short-form digital content optimised for algorithmic visibility rather than cultural meaning. While digital media may contribute to the preservation and global dissemination of folklore traditions, they also expose cultural practices to decontextualisation, commodification, and appropriation. Nyamnjoh (2005) argues that African communicative cultures are historically fluid and adaptive, yet algorithmic infrastructures increasingly reshape these traditions according to external commercial logics embedded within platform capitalism. The viral circulation of African dances, oral humour, and indigenous aesthetics on global platforms often generates substantial economic value for platforms and influencers while originating communities receive limited recognition or material benefit. This raises broader ethical questions concerning ownership, representation, and cultural sovereignty within digitally mediated storytelling economies. Algorithmic storytelling therefore represents not merely a technological transformation of communication but a profound reconfiguration of cultural production, oral tradition, and narrative authority within contemporary digital capitalism.

5.2. Regulatory Gaps and Challenges

One of the most significant challenges confronting contemporary antitrust regulation is the inability of existing legal frameworks to adequately conceptualise and measure narrative influence as a form of market power. Traditional antitrust law developed primarily within industrial economies where monopolistic behaviour could be assessed through relatively quantifiable indicators such as pricing structures, market share, output restriction, and consumer cost (Hovenkamp, 2011). However, digital platform economies increasingly derive dominance through algorithmic control over visibility, attention, and communicative circulation rather than through conventional price-based mechanisms. Platforms such as Google, Meta, TikTok, and YouTube operate largely through “free” services in which economic value is extracted through data collection, behavioural prediction, and advertising ecosystems rather than direct monetary payment (Khan, 2017). Consequently, regulators face substantial difficulty in determining how algorithmic storytelling influences competition because the harms associated with narrative visibility, audience manipulation, and communicative dominance are often intangible, diffuse, and difficult to quantify within conventional legal frameworks. The ability of platforms to shape public perception, influence cultural trends, and govern narrative circulation represents a profound form of discursive power, yet existing antitrust tools remain poorly equipped to evaluate how such influence affects democratic communication, market fairness, and cultural plurality.

This difficulty is compounded by the profound lack of transparency surrounding algorithmic systems and recommendation infrastructures. Contemporary digital platforms rely heavily on proprietary algorithms whose operational logics remain opaque not only to users but often to regulators, researchers, and policymakers themselves (Pasquale, 2015). Recommendation systems continuously adapt through machine learning processes driven by massive datasets, behavioural analytics, and predictive modelling, making it extremely difficult to determine precisely how visibility decisions are made. Gillespie (2018) argues that platforms strategically maintain ambiguity regarding content moderation and recommendation practices to preserve both commercial advantage and regulatory flexibility. As a result, independent creators, advertisers, and smaller firms frequently operate within communicative environments governed by opaque algorithmic criteria that determine discoverability, monetisation, and audience reach without accountability or meaningful oversight. Allegations of shadow banning, selective amplification, politically motivated moderation, and algorithmic favouritism illustrate how visibility itself can become a mechanism of hidden market control. Yet because algorithmic operations are often treated as proprietary corporate assets protected under trade secrecy laws, regulators face significant barriers in accessing the evidence necessary to assess anti-competitive behaviour. This opacity creates a substantial regulatory gap in which digital corporations exercise enormous influence over communication infrastructures while remaining shielded from meaningful scrutiny.

Jurisdictional challenges further complicate efforts to regulate algorithmic storytelling within global platform economies. Unlike traditional monopolies tied to national industries or territorially bounded markets, digital platforms operate transnationally across multiple legal systems, cultural environments, and regulatory jurisdictions simultaneously. A single platform may collect data in Africa, host servers in Europe, operate corporate headquarters in the United States, and distribute content globally through algorithmic infrastructures that transcend national borders. This transnational structure creates profound difficulties for national antitrust authorities attempting to regulate platform behaviour because legal standards concerning data governance, competition law, privacy rights, and freedom of expression vary significantly across jurisdictions (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). The European Union, for example, has adopted relatively aggressive approaches to digital regulation through initiatives such as the Digital Markets Act, whereas many African countries continue to face infrastructural and institutional limitations in regulating global technology corporations effectively. African creators and users, therefore, frequently operate within communication ecosystems governed by foreign platform architectures and regulatory norms over which local governments possess limited influence. Nyamnjoh (2005) observes that global communication systems often reproduce asymmetrical power relations in which African voices and local cultural interests remain subordinated within broader transnational structures of media ownership and technological dependency. Consequently, regulating algorithmic market power requires not merely national legal reform but increasingly coordinated international governance frameworks capable of addressing the global nature of digital communication infrastructures.

Evidence collection and enforcement also present substantial limitations within contemporary antitrust regulation. Traditional competition investigations often rely upon relatively visible evidence such as pricing agreements, merger documents, exclusionary contracts, or market concentration data. By contrast, algorithmic market power frequently operates through dynamic and continuously evolving systems of recommendation, amplification, and behavioural optimisation that are difficult to isolate empirically. Regulators may struggle to demonstrate causal relationships between algorithmic design and anti-competitive outcomes because digital platforms can attribute disparities in visibility or market success to user preference, engagement patterns, or automated optimisation processes rather than intentional discrimination or monopolistic conduct (Crawford, 2021). Furthermore, dominant digital corporations possess enormous legal, technological, and financial resources that allow them to resist regulatory intervention through prolonged litigation, lobbying, and strategic adaptation. Zuboff (2019) argues that surveillance capitalism has produced unprecedented asymmetries of knowledge and power in which technology corporations possess far greater informational capacities than governments, citizens, or regulatory institutions. These asymmetries undermine effective enforcement because regulators often lack the technical expertise, data access, and institutional capacity necessary to scrutinise complex algorithmic systems adequately. As digital communication increasingly becomes organised through algorithmic storytelling infrastructures, the limitations of current antitrust enforcement reveal a broader crisis within regulatory theory itself: contemporary legal frameworks remain rooted in industrial-era assumptions while platform capitalism increasingly operates through data extraction, behavioural influence, and communicative control within digitally mediated attention economies.

5.3. Toward a New Antitrust Paradigm

The rapid transformation of digital communication economies requires a fundamental rethinking of contemporary antitrust theory and regulatory practice. Traditional competition frameworks were largely developed within industrial capitalist contexts where market power could be assessed through control over pricing, production, distribution, and tangible infrastructure (Hovenkamp, 2011). However, contemporary digital platforms increasingly exercise dominance through algorithmic governance, control over visibility, and narrative amplification rather than solely through conventional economic mechanisms. In digital economies organised around attention markets and algorithmically mediated communication, power increasingly depends upon the ability to regulate what users see, hear, consume, and emotionally engage with across interconnected digital ecosystems. Platforms such as Meta, Google, TikTok, and YouTube no longer merely facilitate communication; they actively organise narrative circulation through recommendation systems capable of shaping public discourse, cultural relevance, and economic opportunity. Consequently, antitrust law must expand its definition of market power beyond narrow concerns with pricing and output to include attention control, communicative influence, and narrative dominance as central dimensions of contemporary monopolistic behaviour.

The concept of attention control is particularly important because visibility itself has become a scarce and economically valuable resource within digital platform economies. Wu (2016) argues that modern communication systems increasingly operate as “attention markets” in which corporations compete to capture and monetise human attention through algorithmic optimisation and behavioural prediction. In this environment, market dominance is exercised not merely through ownership of infrastructure but through the capacity to direct public visibility and shape narrative hierarchies. Algorithms determine which stories become viral, which creators achieve discoverability, and which forms of communication remain culturally marginalised. This process generates what may be described as narrative dominance: the ability of digital platforms to influence social perception, consumer behaviour, political discourse, and cultural legitimacy through control over communicative circulation. The political implications of such dominance became particularly visible during controversies surrounding algorithmic amplification of misinformation, conspiracy theories, and political extremism on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube during major electoral processes in the United States, Brazil, and other democracies (Zuboff, 2019). These cases demonstrate that narrative visibility is not simply a cultural phenomenon but a mechanism of infrastructural and economic power capable of simultaneously influencing democratic institutions, public consciousness, and market competition. Antitrust regulation must therefore recognise communicative influence and algorithmic amplification as measurable dimensions of platform dominance.

Addressing these challenges requires the development of new regulatory tools specifically designed for algorithmically mediated economies. One important proposal involves the implementation of algorithmic transparency requirements obliging digital corporations to disclose the general principles governing recommendation systems, content ranking, and visibility optimisation (Pasquale, 2015). Greater transparency would enable regulators, researchers, and civil society organisations to evaluate whether platforms engage in discriminatory amplification, self-preferencing, or anti-competitive manipulation of narrative visibility. Closely related to this is the need for platform neutrality obligations requiring dominant digital corporations to operate recommendation systems in ways that do not unfairly privilege platform-owned content, politically favourable narratives, or commercially affiliated creators. Similar to earlier regulatory frameworks applied to telecommunications and broadcasting industries, platform neutrality principles could help prevent dominant firms from abusing infrastructural control over communication ecosystems. Furthermore, scholars increasingly advocate data-sharing mandates requiring large platforms to provide limited access to anonymised platform data for regulatory oversight, academic research, and market accountability purposes (Khan, 2017). Such measures would reduce informational asymmetries between corporations and regulators while facilitating more effective analysis of algorithmic market power. Without meaningful access to data and algorithmic processes, regulatory institutions remain structurally disadvantaged in confronting technologically sophisticated digital monopolies.

Operationalising Narrative Dominance

For the concept of narrative dominance to acquire practical legal significance, competition authorities require measurable indicators to support regulatory investigations and judicial review. Although the notion of communicative influence provides an important theoretical framework for understanding digital market power, competition law ultimately depends upon operational criteria that can be applied consistently in adversarial proceedings. Consequently, regulators should complement traditional economic indicators with a range of qualitative and quantitative measures specifically designed to assess how algorithmic systems influence market competition through visibility, attention, and recommendation practices.

One useful measure is the Algorithmic Visibility Index (AVI), which assesses the proportion of recommendations, homepage placements, and search results consistently allocated to dominant creators compared with smaller or independent competitors. Such an index would reveal whether recommendation systems systematically privilege established actors, thereby reinforcing existing market concentration. Closely related is the Attention Concentration Ratio (ACR), which measures the percentage of user engagement—such as watch time, listening time, clicks, or interactions—captured by a relatively small number of creators promoted through platform algorithms. High levels of attention concentration may indicate that platforms are not merely reflecting consumer preferences but actively shaping them through algorithmic amplification.

Beyond visibility and engagement, regulators should also consider the extent to which digital platforms promote diversity within their recommendation systems. A Narrative Diversity Score (NDS) could assess the linguistic, cultural, thematic, and geographic diversity represented in algorithmically recommended content. Such a measure would help determine whether recommendation systems encourage communicative plurality or instead privilege homogenised narratives that reinforce commercial interests at the expense of cultural diversity. Equally important is the Creator Discoverability Rate (CDR), which examines the likelihood that new entrants and independent creators appear within recommendation feeds. Low discoverability rates may reveal structural barriers to entry that inhibit competition by limiting emerging creators' opportunities to reach audiences.

Another valuable indicator is an Algorithmic Self-Preferencing Indicator (ASPI), which measures the frequency with which digital platforms prioritise their own commercial products, affiliated services, or preferred creators within recommendation systems. Evidence of systematic self-preferencing may demonstrate that platforms are exploiting their dual role as market participants and market regulators to distort competition in their favour. Such practices resemble traditional exclusionary conduct recognised in competition law but occur through algorithmic rather than contractual mechanisms.

These proposed indicators are not intended to replace established competition measures such as market share, pricing behaviour, or barriers to entry. Rather, they complement existing legal frameworks by providing courts and regulatory authorities with practical tools for evaluating whether digital platforms systematically distort communicative markets through algorithmic visibility, attention allocation, and narrative amplification. By operationalising concepts such as visibility, discoverability, and narrative diversity, competition law can move beyond its traditional emphasis on price-centred consumer welfare towards a more comprehensive understanding of digital market power. In increasingly algorithmic communication environments, the ability to govern attention and shape narrative circulation has become as economically significant as controlling prices, making these new metrics essential for the effective regulation of contemporary platform economies.

A reimagined antitrust framework must also adopt a genuinely interdisciplinary orientation that addresses the cultural, communicative, and sociological dimensions of digital market power. Contemporary platform economies cannot be adequately understood through legal analysis alone, as algorithmic storytelling operates simultaneously as an economic, cultural, political, and technological phenomenon. Integrating insights from media studies, folklore studies, digital sociology, communication theory, and political economy is therefore essential for understanding how narratives circulate within digitally mediated public spheres. Folklore and orality studies, for example, illuminate how storytelling has historically functioned as a mechanism for communal identity formation, memory preservation, and social participation (Finnegan, 2012; Ong, 1982). Digital sociology contributes critical analyses of algorithmic governance, behavioural prediction, and online social interaction, while media studies examines platform infrastructures, visibility regimes, and participatory culture (Couldry, 2012). African scholars such as Nyamnjoh (2005) further demonstrate that communication systems are deeply shaped by cultural contexts, power relations, and histories of inclusion and exclusion. Bringing these disciplines into conversation with antitrust scholarship allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how algorithmic storytelling structures contemporary forms of market power. Ultimately, rethinking antitrust in the age of digital orality requires moving beyond purely economic models toward broader frameworks that address the intersections of communication, culture, technology, and democratic power within global platform capitalism.

6. Discussion

This study demonstrates that algorithmic storytelling has become a central mechanism through which contemporary digital platforms exercise economic, cultural, and communicative power. The analysis reveals that market dominance within platform capitalism increasingly depends not merely on ownership of technological infrastructure or access to data, but on the ability to govern narrative visibility, emotional engagement, and audience attention within algorithmically mediated environments. By foregrounding storytelling as an economic infrastructure, the article extends existing scholarship on surveillance capitalism and platform governance beyond conventional concerns with data extraction and privacy. The study, therefore, contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship arguing that digital power increasingly operates through visibility management, communicative amplification, and behavioural influence within attention-driven economies.

The article also demonstrates the importance of integrating orality studies and folklore scholarship into contemporary debates on digital regulation and competition law. Digital platforms increasingly reproduce many characteristics historically associated with oral cultures, including performativity, immediacy, emotional persuasion, communal participation, and narrative circulation. However, unlike traditional oral environments, contemporary digital orality is profoundly shaped by proprietary algorithms that regulate discoverability, virality, and communicative legitimacy in accordance with commercial imperatives. This transformation raises broader ethical and political questions concerning cultural diversity, democratic communication, and the monopolisation of public attention within global platform economies. Consequently, future antitrust frameworks must move beyond narrow economic models toward broader interdisciplinary approaches that address the intersections of storytelling, communication, culture, and market power in digitally mediated societies.

6.1. Implications for African Digital Governance

The findings of this study have important implications for the future of digital governance across Africa. As digital platforms increasingly shape cultural production, public discourse, and creative economies, African regulatory institutions must move beyond inherited competition frameworks that were developed primarily for industrial markets and adapt them to the realities of algorithmically mediated communication. This requires the development of digital competition policies that recognise algorithmic visibility, attention allocation, and narrative amplification as potential sources of market power. Equally important is the establishment of algorithmic accountability legislation that requires platforms to provide greater transparency regarding content recommendation systems and ranking mechanisms. Given the vulnerability of African creators within global platform economies, regulatory interventions should also protect indigenous digital creators by ensuring equitable opportunities for visibility, monetisation, and participation. Furthermore, digital governance frameworks should encourage multilingual algorithmic fairness, preventing African languages and culturally specific content from being systematically disadvantaged by recommendation algorithms trained predominantly on dominant global languages. Finally, greater platform transparency should be mandated to enable regulators, researchers, and creators to evaluate how algorithmic systems influence cultural diversity, competition, and democratic participation. Collectively, these measures would contribute to a distinctly African approach to digital governance that safeguards both competitive markets and the continent's rich linguistic and cultural heritage while ensuring that algorithmic innovation advances, rather than undermines, communicative justice.

Conclusion

The contemporary digital economy has fundamentally transformed the relationship between communication, storytelling, and market power. This article has argued that algorithmic storytelling constitutes a new and increasingly influential form of economic dominance within platform capitalism, where control over narrative visibility has become inseparable from control over markets themselves. Unlike traditional industrial monopolies rooted primarily in pricing structures, ownership of physical infrastructure, or production capacity, contemporary digital platforms increasingly exercise power through algorithmic governance systems that regulate attention, visibility, emotional engagement, and the circulation of communication. Platforms such as Google, Meta, TikTok, and YouTube do not merely host digital communication; they actively shape which stories become visible, which narratives achieve legitimacy, and which creators gain economic sustainability within global attention economies. The power to amplify certain narratives while marginalising others, therefore, represents a profound form of infrastructural and discursive control that existing antitrust frameworks have yet to adequately recognise.

The urgency of this problem becomes even more significant in increasingly oral, performative, and algorithmically mediated communication environments. The rise of podcasts, short-form video platforms, livestreams, influencer cultures, and voice-driven digital media reflects a broader transformation from text-based information economies toward digitally mediated forms of secondary orality characterised by immediacy, emotional persuasion, and participatory storytelling. Yet these apparently democratised communication spaces remain deeply shaped by opaque recommendation systems, behavioural prediction models, and algorithmic visibility regimes designed primarily to maximise engagement and commercial profitability. As a result, digital storytelling increasingly functions within economic systems that commodify attention, standardise narratives, and reproduce structural inequalities in communicative visibility. Independent creators, minority cultures, local storytelling traditions, and alternative voices frequently encounter significant barriers within platform ecosystems governed by algorithmic amplification and concentrated infrastructural power. The struggle for visibility within digital orality is therefore simultaneously a struggle over culture, economics, democracy, and public discourse in the twenty-first century.

Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental reconceptualisation of competition law and regulatory theory in the digital age. Traditional antitrust paradigms centred narrowly on consumer prices and market output are no longer sufficient for understanding economies organised around data extraction, behavioural influence, and algorithmic storytelling. Contemporary market power increasingly operates through attention control, narrative dominance, and communicative governance rather than solely through conventional monopolistic pricing practices. Future regulatory frameworks must therefore expand the meaning of anti-competitive behaviour to include algorithmic manipulation, visibility discrimination, narrative monopolisation, and platform-driven control over communicative infrastructures. Such an approach demands interdisciplinary engagement among law, media studies, folklore studies, digital sociology, communication theory, and political economy to fully grasp the cultural and democratic implications of algorithmic storytelling. Ultimately, rethinking antitrust in the age of digital orality is not merely a legal necessity but a broader democratic imperative to protect communicative plurality, cultural diversity, and equitable participation within increasingly algorithmically governed public spheres.

In all, the future of competition law may depend upon its ability to recognise that in digitally mediated societies, the struggle over markets is increasingly inseparable from the struggle over visibility, communication, and storytelling itself. In the age of algorithmic orality, those who control narrative infrastructures increasingly shape not only economic competition but also the conditions of democratic participation, cultural legitimacy, and public consciousness.

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