

ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL THEORY ON COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AS A SPACE OF RESISTANCE

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Abstrak

Teknologi komunikasi di era digital membawa dampak besar terhadap kehidupan sosial, ekonomi, dan politik, namun dari perspektif Teori Kritis, teknologi ini kerap berfungsi sebagai instrumen dominasi. Industri budaya, algoritma media sosial, dan praktik kapitalisme pengawasan memperlihatkan bagaimana teknologi justru memperkuat ketimpangan, menciptakan alienasi digital, serta membatasi kebebasan individu. Dalam konteks ini, kritik terhadap teknologi komunikasi menjadi penting untuk mengungkap mekanisme dominasi yang tersembunyi. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis teknologi komunikasi melalui lensa Teori Kritis dengan menekankan potensi ruang resistensi. Metode yang digunakan adalah kajian pustaka sistematis dengan analisis tematik terhadap literatur primer dan sekunder mengenai dominasi, ideologi, dan perlawanan digital. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan peneliti mengidentifikasi pola dominasi teknologi sekaligus peluang emansipasi melalui penggunaan ruang digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meski teknologi komunikasi sering digunakan untuk mengontrol informasi, memonopoli opini publik, dan memperkuat struktur kapitalis, ruang digital juga menyediakan potensi resistensi. Media baru memungkinkan munculnya gerakan sosial, partisipasi publik, dan perlawanan terhadap hegemoni global. Dengan demikian, Teori Kritis menegaskan perlunya kesadaran kritis agar teknologi tidak semata-mata menjadi alat dominasi, melainkan juga sarana emansipasi untuk menciptakan keadilan sosial dan demokrasi.

Kata Kunci: *Teori Kritis, Teknologi Komunikasi, Industri Budaya, Resistensi Digital, Kapitalisme Pengawasan*

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Abstract

Communication technology in the digital era has significantly influenced social, economic, and political life, yet from the perspective of Critical Theory, it often functions as an instrument of domination. The culture industry, social media algorithms, and surveillance capitalism illustrate how technology reinforces inequality, fosters digital alienation, and restricts individual freedom. In this regard, critiques of communication technology are essential to uncover hidden mechanisms of power. This study aims to analyze communication technology through the lens of Critical Theory, emphasizing its potential as a space of resistance. The research employs a systematic literature review with thematic analysis of primary and secondary sources on domination, ideology, and digital resistance. This approach allows the identification of both technological domination patterns and emancipatory opportunities enabled by digital spaces. The findings reveal that although communication technology is often utilized to control information, monopolize public opinion, and strengthen capitalist structures, digital platforms also provide opportunities for resistance. New media facilitates the rise of social movements, public participation, and challenges to global hegemony. Thus, Critical Theory underscores the importance of cultivating critical awareness so that technology can serve not only as a tool of domination but also as a means of emancipation toward social justice and democracy.

Keywords: Critical Theory, Communication Technology, Culture Industry, Digital Resistance, Surveillance Capitalism

INTRODUCTION

Communication technology, particularly in today's digital era, has rapidly advanced and brought about significant impacts on various aspects of social, economic, and political life. However, from a critical theory perspective, communication technology is often viewed as a tool of domination that reinforces existing power structures, exacerbates inequality, and strengthens control over individuals and groups within society. Criticism of communication technology as a tool of domination focuses on several key aspects, such as the commodification of information, surveillance, ideological control, and unequal access. The following is a discussion of some of the main criticisms that often arise regarding communication technology in the context of domination. Criticisms of



communication technology as a tool of domination encompass various issues related to the commodification of information, surveillance, ideological manipulation, the digital divide, and social polarization. In the critical theory perspective, technology is not seen as a neutral tool, but as a system that reinforces existing inequalities and power. Therefore, it is important to examine the social and political impact of communication technology, and to develop policies and solutions that can reduce the potential for misuse and exploitation that may arise from the development of this technology (Marcuse, H. 1964).

Digital technology has transformed personal data and communication into new sources of surplus value, raising new threats to privacy. In this context, technology is not only a neutral tool but also strengthens domination through surveillance and algorithmic control over user behavior (Seubert & Becker, 2019), (Bakardjieva & Gehl, 2017). Furthermore, digital technology expands domination through new forms of control, network authoritarianism, and exploitation, leading to a surveillance society (Wozniak, 2019). The growth of communication technology and new media has negative implications for the communication system, especially in the spread of uncontrolled media content that does not adhere to journalistic ethics. Social media has become a "cyber war" arena for many people due to the lack of censorship and journalistic codes of ethics, which can eventually trigger conflicts within society (Nugroho & Fitriawan, 2020).

Technology is often used to construct, maintain, or reinforce power relations between individuals or groups. Therefore, technology can empower or weaken social agents in different ways (Brey, 2008). Moreover, critical theory highlights how technology can threaten civil liberties and personal autonomy, and how technology is not value-neutral in revealing the surrounding power structures (Arda, 2023). Resistance to communication technology often emerges as a reaction to organizational tensions that arise during the adoption of technology (Jian, 2007). In the context of globalization, resistance is also understood as a complex and interconnected process occurring within transnational hegemony (Pal & Dutta, 2008). New communication technologies have the potential to gather the public around technical networks, which can produce new forms of resistance against the rationalization tendencies in a technologized society (Feenberg, 2009). By exploring how digital spaces can be liberated from capitalist logic and how techno-political perspectives can help frame HCI research related to degrowth (Nieves et al., 2024), we can better understand how communication systems act as hot machines that can extract labor from



the transmission of information, illustrating how information and power can be transmitted in parallel (Yan & Ge, 2024).

Critical theory analysis of communication technology, particularly from the perspective of critical theory, focuses on how this technology affects the distribution of power and how resistance may arise as a response to these dynamics. One of the main challenges is how technology can be used to democratize power. Further research is needed to develop strategies that can promote the democratization of technology and reduce the injustices resulting from the uneven distribution of power. There is a need to continue critiquing hegemonic communication practices carried out by powerful market actors during global crises. This study highlights the importance of resistive communication carried out by consumers or marginalized actors to highlight inequality and the dynamics of power (Aini Safitri, 2021; Baharuddin et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Theory

Critical Theory was developed by German intellectuals from the Frankfurt School, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. It emerged as a response to the anti-socialist dominance in contemporary society, aiming to contextualize and critique Marxist theory in the face of modern capitalist systems (Kurniawati et al., 2021; Donatus, 2015). As a second-generation Frankfurt School philosopher, Habermas further developed Critical Theory by integrating it with the theory of communicative action. His work emphasized the role of communication in achieving enlightenment and humanizing education, in contrast to views that see humans as passive entities (Hidayat, 2017; Muklis Al'anam & Radian Salman, 2024).

This concept explores the irony that the pursuit of reason and freedom can lead to new forms of rationality and oppression, challenging assumptions of modernity and enlightenment (Kurniawati et al., 2021). Habermas's communicative action theory serves as a philosophical foundation for human rights and education, advocating for dialogue and understanding as a means to liberate human knowledge from oppression (Hidayat, 2017; Muklis Al'anam & Radian Salman, 2024). Critical Theory has been applied to educational models, promoting critical thinking and humanizing approaches to learning. Habermas's ideas, in particular, have been used to develop educational frameworks that encourage engagement and critical reflection (Hidayat, 2017; Nusarastraya et al., 2013).

Communication Technology



The concept of communication technology has diverse theoretical foundations, encompassing various approaches and paradigms that have evolved alongside technological advancements. Traditional communication focused on data transmission without considering the meaning of the message being sent. The new paradigm proposes advancing communication systems to the semantic level, where the meaning of the transmitted data becomes the main focus, allowing for greater efficiency with lower data transmission needs (Niu et al., 2022). In cyber-physical systems, the effectiveness of communication is measured by task completion efficiency, not just bit rates. This requires a combination of information theory, communication, control, and computer science to design communication strategies that align with tasks (Mostaani et al., 2021).

Human-Machine Communication.

With the rise of AI, the traditional communication paradigm, focused on human-to-human interaction, needs to be adjusted. This theory emphasizes the functional dimensions, relational dynamics, and metaphysical implications of human interaction with AI technology (Guzman & Lewis, 2019). The sixth generation of wireless networks faces new challenges such as the need for high-speed data, low latency, and massive connectivity. This requires optimization of the entire communication chain and exploration of new physical phenomena to understand technological limitations (Chafii et al., 2022). As an interdisciplinary discipline, quantum communication combines classical telecommunications and quantum mechanics, focusing on quantum key distribution, secure communication, and quantum cryptography (Su & Zhu, 2022). The theoretical foundation of communication technology includes various paradigms and approaches developed to meet the needs of modern communication. From semantic communication to quantum communication, each approach offers new ways to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of communication systems (Dasar & Yogyakarta, 2015; Hijriana, 2020). These new paradigms not only transform our understanding of communication but also open up new opportunities for practical applications across various fields (Baharuddin et al., 2025; Samosir, 2023).

Resistance

The concept of resistance in a theoretical context encompasses various dimensions and approaches. In general, resistance can be understood as the opposition actions taken by individuals or groups against power or changes that threaten their status quo. The dimensions of resistance can be divided into four possible areas: individual infrapolitics, collective infrapolitics, defiance, and rebellion. These are known as the "four



It's" of resistance, which highlight the different ways resistance can manifest and its political impact (Mumby et al., 2017). Referring to resistance actions taken routinely without clear political claims or formal organization, everyday resistance involves the relationships between actors, as well as the spatial and temporal aspects of resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

Resistance can be categorized based on whether it is acknowledged by others and whether it is intentional. This helps clarify the sociological meaning and usefulness of the concept of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Resistance is not only related to measurable objects or relationships but also plays an important role in epistemological, ethical, and anthropological contexts. As an ethical category, resistance can be defined as a rejection of typologies and subjects for calculation (Wiegerling, 2021). In organizational contexts, resistance is often seen as an obstacle to change. However, resistance can also be viewed as a normal response to threats to the status quo, which can be managed to minimize negative impacts and take advantage of adaptive changes (DuBose & Mayo, 2020). Overall, resistance is a complex and multidimensional concept that includes various forms and contexts. It can be an individual or collective action, carried out openly or covertly, and can have significant political, social, and psychological implications. Understanding resistance within a broad theoretical framework allows for a deeper and more applicable analysis across various fields of study.

RESEARCH METHODS

The literature review methodology is a research approach conducted by gathering, analyzing, and interpreting relevant literature sources to answer research questions or support specific arguments. This method is used to conduct a comprehensive and structured review of literature, allowing for the emergence of new themes and analysis of the relationships between concepts (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013). In this context, the literature review serves as the primary method to explore concepts, theories, and findings related to communication technology, power, and resistance. This methodology aims to understand existing theoretical perspectives, identify research gaps, and provide a strong foundation for further analysis.

The first step in the literature review is to identify and collect relevant sources of literature. These sources can include books, journal articles, conference proceedings, research reports, and digital documents. Searches are conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, and ProQuest. Keywords such as "communication technology," "critical theory," "hegemony," and "resistance" are used to narrow down the search. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied to ensure that the



literature used is relevant, valid, and up-to-date. Once the literature is collected, the next step is a critical analysis of the content of each source. The literature is categorized based on main themes or topics, such as the dominance of technology, digital resistance, and the social implications of technology-based communication. Content analysis techniques are used to identify patterns, relationships, and differences between theories and findings from previous research. This analysis helps formulate a synthesis that describes the dynamics of power and resistance in communication technology.

Synthesis is conducted by integrating various perspectives and theories that have been analyzed to create a holistic understanding of the research subject. This process involves comparing theoretical arguments, assessing the relevance of previous findings, and developing a relevant conceptual framework. In the writing process, each finding is systematically organized to build a cohesive and logical narrative. To ensure validity, only literature from trusted and peer-reviewed sources is used. However, the literature review method has limitations, such as dependence on secondary data and the risk of interpretive bias. Therefore, the analysis is conducted critically and reflectively to reduce bias and ensure that the research findings are reliable and relevant to the study's objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Critique of Communication Technology as a Tool of Domination

The results of this study, based on the literature review method, highlight critiques of communication technology as a tool of domination, the culture industry, and standardization, as well as resistance in the use of communication technology. The critique of communication technology as a tool of domination is a key theme in critical theory, especially within the Frankfurt School tradition. This critique emphasizes how communication technology, which should function to expand individual freedom, is often used to reinforce control, domination, and power within society (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1988). Communication technology is often not neutral and is developed in specific social, political, and economic contexts. In modern capitalism, communication technology is controlled by elite groups (corporations, governments, or major media) who use it to control public narratives.

Spread of Dominant Ideology

Mass media is frequently used to disseminate certain values and ideologies that benefit the elite, such as capitalism or consumerism. Examples include television, radio, and the internet, which are often used as propaganda tools by governments or aggressive marketing instruments.



Communication technology has enabled mass control of information, such as:

- 1) Monopoly on Information.
Large tech companies like Google, Meta (Facebook), and Amazon control the global distribution of information, regulating what is accessible to the public.
- 2) Algorithm Manipulation.
Social media algorithms are often designed to promote content that benefits the platform owners' interests, even if it polarizes or manipulates users. An example of this is the echo chamber phenomenon on social media, where users are exposed only to views that reinforce their beliefs, limiting open and critical discussion.

Social Alienation through Communication Technology
Instead of bringing people closer, communication technology often creates social distance:

- 1) Digital Alienation.
Human interaction is replaced by shallow and impersonal digital communication.
- 2) Commodification of People.
Social media turns users into "products" whose data is collected and sold to advertisers. Platforms like Instagram or TikTok capitalize on users' attention for economic profit, creating social pressure to appear "perfect."

With the advancement of communication technology, surveillance has become easier:

- 1) State Surveillance.
Governments can use communication technology to spy on citizens, track their activities, and control behavior.
- 2) Surveillance Capitalism.
A term coined by Shoshana Zuboff, it describes how big tech companies exploit user data to predict and influence their behavior. For instance, the Cambridge Analytica scandal exposed how social media data was used to manipulate election results.

Passive Consumption and Loss of Control

Communication technology often locks society into passive consumption: *Loss of Control* algorithms and technology often take over individual decisions, such as in shopping recommendations, entertainment, or news consumption. Examples include platforms like YouTube or Netflix, which use algorithms to continuously push content without allowing space for critical reflection. The critique of communication technology as a tool of



domination reveals how technology can reinforce power imbalances rather than liberate individuals. To address this, there needs to be critical awareness and the development of technology that prioritizes justice, democracy, and diversity (Zuboff, 2020).

Culture Industry and Standardization Critique

Culture industry and standardization are concepts often associated with social analysis and cultural criticism within critical theory, particularly discussed by Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Both observed how popular culture and the entertainment industry, produced by large corporations, influence societal mindsets, reduce cultural diversity, and produce consumers who are more easily influenced. This discussion unpacks how the culture industry functions in capitalist societies and the role of standardization in modernizing and dominating cultural production (Jenkins & Plasencia, 2017).

Critique of the Culture Industry and Standardization

The culture industry and standardization are key concepts in understanding how culture is produced, consumed, and managed in capitalist societies. The main critique of this phenomenon focuses on how cultural products become commodities that are mass-produced and consumed, reducing cultural diversity and strengthening dominant ideologies. In this context, standardization serves as a tool that reinforces social and political control by reducing creative expression to safe and economically profitable formulas. However, on the other hand, digital technology opens new opportunities for cultural diversity, providing space for alternative voices and creative empowerment outside of corporate control. Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer introduced the concept of the culture industry. Communication technology plays a significant role in mass cultural production. Communication technology enables the production of uniform cultural content for mass consumption. *Cultural Homogenization*, Technology often eliminates local cultural diversity in favor of global values dictated by large corporations.

The Culture Industry and Standardization concept, developed by Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (1944), is part of their critique of modern capitalism, which integrates culture into the logic of mass production. The culture industry refers to the process by which cultural products such as art, music, films, and media are produced and distributed as commodities by the capitalist system. Culture is no longer created for individual expression or aesthetic value but for commercial purposes. Standardization is a key characteristic



of the culture industry, referring to the process of homogenizing cultural products. In this context:

- 1) Mass Production.
Cultural products are designed to reach a broad market and can be mass-produced.
- 2) The Same Format.
Cultural products follow certain formulas and patterns that are proven to sell in the market.
- 3) Elimination of Creativity.
Due to the focus on profit, the culture industry disregards uniqueness and innovation to ensure consistency and predictability.
- 4) Passive Consumption.
- 5) Standardized cultural products promote passive consumption.
People tend to accept cultural products without reflecting on or critiquing them. Example: Binge-watching TV shows or streaming content excessively.
- 6) Cultural Homogenization.
Cultural diversity is threatened as local cultural products are replaced by global products produced by large industries. Example: Traditional music being overshadowed by international pop music.
- 7) Loss of Meaning and Autonomy.
Mass-produced culture often loses artistic meaning or depth, as it is focused on light entertainment. Example: Modern art being commodified as investment objects rather than expressions of creativity.
- 8) The Control Over Public Taste.
The culture industry creates controlled public taste through the media. What is considered "cool" or "good" is often influenced by large-scale promotion. Example: Music promoted on social media tends to become popular despite its questionable quality.
- 9) In the digital era, the culture industry is increasingly relevant with the rise of communication technology and the internet. Platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, and Netflix accelerate the production and distribution of standardized culture. Algorithms and recommendation systems reinforce homogeneous consumption patterns by promoting similar content previously liked by users.
- 10) Data Commodification.
User cultural preferences are collected as data to market more similar products.

The culture industry and standardization are part of the critical theory's critique of capitalism, which emphasizes how culture has lost its



autonomy and authenticity. In an increasingly digitally connected world, this critique remains relevant in understanding how market logic influences how we enjoy art, media, and entertainment. It is essential to encourage critical cultural consumption and promote authentic creativity to resist the domination of the culture industry (Mansell, Robin; Hwa Ang, 2015).

Critique of the Myth of Technological Progress

The myth of technological progress is often understood as a narrative or view that assumes that technological advancement always brings positive and progressive impacts on society and human life. This view assumes that every technological innovation will solve social problems, improve quality of life, and lead to social and economic improvements. However, in critical theory's perspective, technological progress is not always viewed with the same optimism. Many thinkers, especially from the Frankfurt School such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, critique this view, arguing that technology often strengthens inequality, worsens social domination, and produces negative consequences that are not always visible initially.

Discussions on the myth of technological progress focus on how technology is often positioned as an inevitable tool for progress, even though, in reality, such progress is often accompanied by controversial social and political impacts that are not always beneficial for society as a whole. The myth of technological progress carries the one-sided view that technology always brings positive and progressive changes for society. However, through the critique of critical theory and thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer, we can understand that technological progress often comes with negative impacts that are not always visible initially. Technology, while offering convenience and efficiency, also has the potential to exacerbate social inequalities, threaten privacy, worsen environmental damage, and strengthen economic and political domination (Poster, M. 2006).

The myth of technological progress is a critical idea that shows how technology is often seen as a universal solution to social, economic, and political problems, without considering the negative impacts or inequalities it generates (O'Donnell, 2009). In critical theory's view, this myth serves to reinforce the existing power structures by creating the narrative that technological progress always brings benefits for everyone, even though this is not always the case. The myth of technological progress is the belief that: (1) Technology always brings improvements to human life; (2) Technological progress is a natural, inevitable, and positive process; (3) Everyone will benefit equally from technology.



This myth is rooted in views of modernity and positivism, which link technological development to overall human progress. In capitalism, technology is often seen as a means to increase productivity and efficiency, but without considering its side effects on humans and the environment. Critical theory, especially from the Frankfurt School, provides a deep critique of this idea:

- 1) Technology is often used by those in power to maintain domination, such as surveillance technologies like CCTV cameras, facial recognition software, and data tracking tools used to control populations.
- 2) Information manipulation through algorithms that reinforce political polarization and strengthen dominant narratives.

Although advanced technology continues to develop, not everyone has equal access to it, leading to a digital divide, with a gap between those who have access to technology (especially in developed countries) and those who do not (in developing countries). Economic access, only certain groups can afford the latest technologies, while others are left behind. Technology production often involves labor exploitation. For example, workers in electronics factories in developing countries often receive low wages and work in poor conditions. Exploitation of natural resources, Mining raw materials for technology, such as cobalt and lithium, often damages the environment and triggers social conflicts.

Technology is seen as neutral, but in reality, it is developed within specific social, political, and economic contexts. The interests of those controlling technology often influence how it is designed and used. This myth creates several negative impacts, such as:

- 1) Dehumanization.
Humans are treated as data or objects to be manipulated, especially in the digital age. Example: Using personal data for advertising without user consent.
- 2) Alienation.
Technology can create distance between humans, work, nature, and each other in workplaces where automation replaces human labor, reducing emotional and creative involvement from workers.
- 3) Environmental Damage.
Technological progress often negatively impacts the environment. The production of electronic devices generates toxic waste, and energy consumption by data centers and digital technologies accelerates climate change.



4) Social Polarization.

Digital technology, especially social media, exacerbates polarization by spreading information that reinforces users' biases.

Technological progress indeed brings great benefits, such as: (a) Improved health through medical innovations; (b) Global communication convenience; (c) Efficiency in goods production and distribution. However, these benefits are not always evenly distributed: Many societies still lag in education and technology. The negative impacts are often felt by marginalized groups or developing countries.

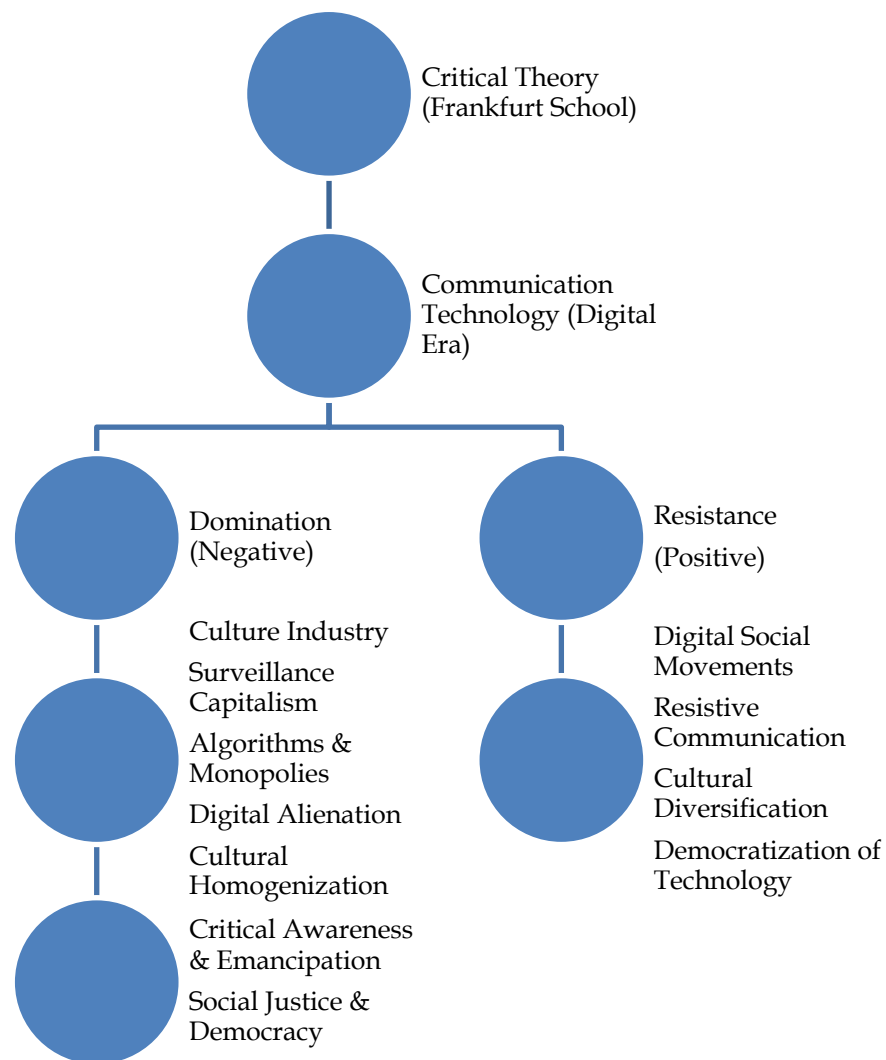


Figure 1: Visual Sceme Critical Theory Frankfurt School



CONCLUSION

Communication technology is often viewed not only as a tool that facilitates human activity but also as a means of domination that strengthens existing power structures. Criticism of technology as a tool of domination encompasses issues that demonstrate how technology is used to solidify political, economic, and social control by the authorities. One such example is the culture industry and standardization, which affects cultural production by creating homogenization and reducing the diversity of authentic cultural values. This results in a consumerist culture that prioritizes commercial profit over aesthetic and social values, thereby diminishing societal creativity.

Furthermore, the myth of technological progress as a universal solution often overlooks the complex social, political, and environmental impacts. This perspective necessitates a deep critique of the inequalities arising from technological innovation. By adopting a more critical viewpoint, society can ensure that technology is not only used to accelerate change but also to support justice, sustainability, and human values. In this context, it is essential to consider the long-term effects of technology on humanity and the environment.

Although often used for domination, technology also has great potential as a space of resistance. Digital technology, for instance, enables individuals and groups to fight against injustice, break through hegemony, and advocate for social change. Despite the risks of misuse, this tool offers opportunities to fight for human rights, freedom of expression, and social justice. Therefore, it is crucial to explore innovative ways of utilizing technology for progressive resistance, while maintaining a balance between its benefits and the negative impacts on social interaction, privacy, and individual identity.

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