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The Dilemma of Using Social Media in the Documentary Film the Social Dilemma

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the representation of social media usage dilemmas in the documentary film *The Social Dilemma*. The aim of this study is to ascertain how the film's storyline is constructed and how it depicts the various dilemmas arising from social media use.

Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this study applies film narrative analysis to unravel the plot structure of the film and Michel Foucault's Panopticon theory as a conceptual framework to understand the mechanisms of surveillance and control represented in social media. Data sources were obtained through in-depth observation of each scene in the movie.

The findings indicate that *The Social Dilemma* portrays the social media dilemma through a cause-and-effect relationship in its narrative, where algorithmic systems create unconscious surveillance, personal data recording, and display manipulation. The central dilemma lies in social media's power to imprison and control its users through notifications, content recommendations, advertising recommendations, and the "like" button feature. Consequently, the movie also highlights the importance of awareness and intelligence in social media usage.

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Introduction

The internet, as a modern communication tool, has gone beyond mere technical functions; it has become an arena where technical systems interact with changing cultural and social models of communication [1]. Social media, as one of the main manifestations of the internet, is now an unavoidable source of instant information. However, behind its ease of accessibility, social media also brings significant negative impacts, such as addiction and antisocial behavior.

This research analyzes the phenomenon of social media use dilemma through the lens of the documentary film *The Social Dilemma*. The film vividly illustrates society's ambivalence towards social media: on the one hand, it becomes the main source of information fulfillment; on the other hand, it causes various negative consequences such as reduced interpersonal interaction and addiction. The film also highlights how social media, like "CCTV", unconsciously monitors the movements and behavior of its users through a complex system of algorithms, which are able to influence and control human attention.

The Social Dilemma asserts that social media has created serious social problems in society. Nonetheless, the movie succeeds in influencing the audience's perception of social media, encouraging awareness of a more wise use. The relevance of this issue is reinforced by *We Are Social*'s data showing the rapid increase of social media users in Indonesia, reaching 191.4 million accounts by 2022. This figure reflects the high dependence of modern society on social media for information needs.

This research is crucial because the movie *The Social Dilemma* is very relevant to the reality of people's lives today who are increasingly dependent on social media. The movie is supported by expert speakers who have worked in the social media industry, adding credibility to the depiction of the dilemma presented. The storyline packed with interesting illustrations is also considered effective in describing the use of social media in society. Furthermore, this research uses Michel Foucault's Panopticon concept as a framework to understand how social media "imprisons" its users in a dilemma, explaining the role of the controller and the controlled in the social media ecosystem. Specifically, this paper aims to explain how the movie *The Social Dilemma* represents the *dilemma* of social media users trapped in this system of surveillance and control.

Literature Review

This research builds on previous relevant studies. One of them is the research "Social Media Issues in Jeff Orlowski's *The Social Dilemma Documentary*" by S. Rizkiwa Arham from Universitas Gadjah Mada [2]. The findings of the study highlight that the film discusses the topic of social media from the perspective of advertising business models, manipulating persuasive technology, the dominance of social media over human life, to new forms of alienation and control of capitalism through algorithms.

Furthermore, the research "Semiotics Analysis of *The Social Dilemma Film*" (2021) by Siti Ashfiasari and Mariati Tirta Wiyata from Wiyata Indonesia Institute of Management is also relevant [3]. This qualitative research aims to understand the conveyance of intent in the movie through semiotic analysis, showing that the movie *The Social Dilemma* is rich in signs that successfully explain

the negative impact of excessive social media use and convey the director's intent effectively.

Theoretical Foundation

Plot Theory To analyze the narrative representation in a work, the exploration of plot is essential. According to Waluyo, plot consists of seven main elements [4]:

1. **Exposure:** The initial presentation of the story, introducing the topic, characters, time, and place.
2. **Stimulation:** The emergence of the initial problem or conflict to be developed.
3. **Containment:** Increased intensity of conflict.
4. **Complication:** The increasingly complex conflicts, the inevitable clash of interests, make the core of the story more tense.
5. **Climax:** The culmination of the conflict where the character's fate is decided.
6. **The denouement:** Showing the aftermath of the climax and resolution of the story.
7. **Solution:** The conflict reaches its resolution, the tension unravels. This plot theory will be used to dissect the narrative structure of *The Social Dilemma* and understand how the story elements are organized to convey the message of the social media dilemma.

Panopticon Theory (Michel Foucault) The concept of the Panopticon, introduced by Michel Foucault, refers to a surveillance structure that allows for the continuous monitoring, surveillance, and management of individuals without direct contact. The main effect of Panopticon mechanisms is to create awareness in individuals that they are constantly observed, which in turn results in compliance, pressure, and even fear [5].

In this study, the Panopticon theory is used as a **Conceptual Framework to Analyze How the Film *the Social Dilemma* Represents the Mechanisms of Surveillance and Control Exercised by Social Media Over Its Users**. The emphasis is on how the film depicts social media as an entity that unconsciously monitors and controls its users, similar to the Panopticon model.

It explains how social media can control and be monitored based on what is depicted in the documentary. The use of this theory is not to measure the direct impact on the film's audience, but rather to examine how the narrative and visuals in the film illustrate the principles of the Panopticon in the context of users' interactions with social media.

Conceptual Foundation

- **Dilemma:** According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), a dilemma is a difficult situation that requires one to choose between two equally unpleasant or detrimental options, or a confusing situation [6]. In the context of this research, dilemma refers to the difficult situation faced by social media users due to its negative characteristics and impacts.
- **Social Media:** Van Dijk defines social media as platforms that focus on the existence of users, facilitating their activities and collaboration [7]. Nasrullah categorizes social media

into six types: social networking, online journals (blogs), microblogging, sharing media, social bookmarking, and shared content media or Wiki [8]. Social media enables global connectivity, used for a variety of purposes, from politics to movie promotion.

- **Movies:** Movies are an engaging form of audio-visual entertainment. As mass communication, movies carry messages that vary depending on their mission, aiming to draw attention to the issues they contain. Filmmaking involves a process of conceptualizing ideas and technical skills to produce a work worth watching.

Research Methods This research adopts a **Descriptive Qualitative** approach. The main analytical method used is **Film Narrative Analysis**, focusing on the observation and interpretation of key *scenes* in *The Social Dilemma*. Waluyo's plot theory is applied to understand the narrative structure and cause-and-effect relationships depicted in the movie [4]. In addition, Michael Foucault's Panopticon theory is used as a **Conceptual Framework** to analyze how the film *represents* the mechanism of social media surveillance and control over its users.

Qualitative research aims to explain phenomena in depth, through data collection and analysis that focuses on the depth of meaning, not the quantity of data or population [9]. The main data sources were obtained through systematic observation of each scene in the movie *The Social Dilemma*. Data collection was also supported by literature studies related to movies and social media issues. The analysis procedure involves:

1. **Scene Identification and Classification:** Identify key scenes that are relevant to the research objectives, especially those that depict the storyline and social media dilemma.
2. **Detailed Description:** Performs visual, audio, and dialog descriptions of the selected scene.
3. **Narrative Interpretation:** Analyzing how the scenes contribute to the film's storyline and convey messages about the dilemma of social media, using Waluyo's plot theory.
4. **Panopticon Conceptual Analysis:** Interpret how the scenes represent the concept of the Panopticon, which is a mechanism of unconscious surveillance, data recording, and control through social media features.

Findings

The film "The Social Dilemma" narratively shows the unconscious surveillance of social media users on their activities. Social media algorithms are depicted recording users' personal data and manipulating content display to maintain user engagement. This impact is depicted through various scenes, such as algorithm control over content preferences, to manipulation of user emotions through notifications and content recommendations.

Here is a table describing the findings based on the scene analysis of the movie: (This table stays the same, I didn't change the content, just made sure the placement stays appropriate).

Image	Scene	Description
Figure 1: Minute 09:30		<p>This <i>scene</i> illustrates how social media tries to control its users with various features, such as ads, <i>likes</i>, notifications, and so on.</p>
Figure 2: Minute 17:35		<p>This <i>scene</i> illustrates how the algorithm system continues to make predictions based on what users often see and like when using social media, then recommends it to its users. These recommendations are made randomly by the algorithm based on things that we might like judging from the content that we often see and <i>like</i>.</p>
Figure 3: Minute 18:56		<p>This scene illustrates how social media algorithm systems control us like voodoo dolls. When social media companies update their algorithms to perfectly match user characteristics. There are three figures acting as algorithms that process data and information presented to users to create accurate user models. The glowing blue figure shows the process of creating a voodoo doll- like social media user model (social media user model named Ben).</p>
Figure 4: Minute 35:30		<p>This scene illustrates how social media's algorithmic system invades the subconscious of its users, and also shows how easy it is for social media to distract its users with just one feature - notifications.</p>
Figure 5: Minute 40:37		<p>This scene shows a graph of the increase in suicide deaths among teenage girls. This is to illustrate a phenomenon experienced by one of the social media users, Isla as a young girl who is still vulnerable in interacting with others through social media. The graph also symbolizes that the suicide rate among young women has also increased since the advent of social media.</p>
Figure 6: Minute 41:58		<p>This scene illustrates the insecurity phenomenon experienced by Isla after receiving negative comments about the shape of her ears from a photo she uploaded on social media. The phenomenon experienced by Isla shows that young women who use social media are still vulnerable and not good at filtering the comments and words of others on social media, which is also one of the factors driving the increase in deaths from suicide.</p>

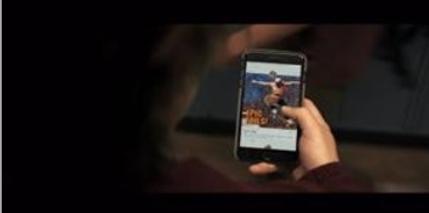
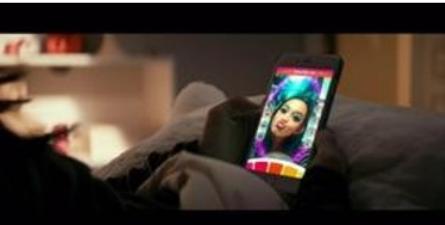
Figure 7: Minute 45:45		This scene illustrates how a person's condition is when they miss information from social media. The ape symbol signifies the primitive era used as a symbol of ignorance and backwardness that Ben feels when he is not holding his cellphone. In the movie The Social Dilemma, it illustrates a phenomenon related to the primitive era where users feel left out of information when not accessing social media.
Figure 8: Minute 46:38		This scene illustrates how the process of making Ben's voodoo doll model, which was originally only blue, indicating that the data collected by the algorithm about Ben was not much, now begins to have other colors that almost resemble Ben's shape, indicating that the algorithm already has almost qualified data and information about Ben.
Figure 9: Minute 76:04		The scene illustrates that along with Ben's intense use of social media, the data obtained by the social media company about Ben is getting perfect. By the end of the movie, Ben's voodoo doll is accurate and perfect. With the perfection of Ben's voodoo doll model, it indicates that the social media company has gotten a complete picture of Ben, including the content he likes, the information he needs, and the ads he wants to see.
Picture 10: Minute 63:22		This scene illustrates that the phenomenon of polarization occurs when the algorithm has succeeded in forming its user model perfectly. the spread of hoax information about covid and the emergence of conspiracy theories and political propaganda about distrust of governments in various countries that trigger chaos and riots. The movie The Social Dilemma reveals that the spread of false information and propaganda on social media cannot be stopped.
Figure 11: Minute 18:45		This scene illustrates how the algorithm system always recommends content that users have seen and searched for. This makes us imprisoned in the same content.
Figure 12: Minute 64:10		This scene illustrates that a lot of hoax news has emerged related to the coronavirus. News that is trending because of likes and shares will continue to rise and be seen a lot, this can cause changes in views and indoctrinate social media users to believe in the information that is spread.

Figure 13: Minute 21:16		This scene depicts the lack of interpersonal interaction between Ben and his friend due to their respective social media notifications, the focus of interaction immediately shifts to their social media activities. Gestures that show no interest in direct human interaction are shown by the players staring at their respective phones. The players look like two strangers sitting next to each other, even though they are friends and know each other.
Figure 14: Minute 24:55		This scene illustrates how Ben's focus is always distracted when social media notifications appear on his device. This causes Ben to not focus on learning in class.
Figure 15: Minute 53:02		This scene depicts Ben who is exhausted after a night of playing social media. As a result, Ben overslept and was late for school.
Figure 16: Minute 34:03		This scene depicts Ben's family having dinner. Isla is so focused on social media that she doesn't notice the people around her.
Figure 17: Minute 38:37		This scene depicts Isla polishing her photos with various filters from social media to make them look better. She does this to get likes and positive comments from other social media users.

Discussion

This discussion will elaborate on the research findings by integrating film narrative analysis and Michel Foucault's Panopticon conceptual framework.

Based on the analysis using plot theory, The Social Dilemma effectively builds a narrative through cause-and-effect relationships. Each statement from the source (cause) is visually and narratively supported by illustrations played by actors in the movie (effect), strengthening the storyline and the message to be conveyed. This shows how the narrative structure of the movie is used to educate and influence the audience's perception.

Furthermore, based on the Panopticon conceptual framework, the movie The Social Dilemma clearly shows that the dilemma of using social media is greatly influenced by the way the algorithm behind it works. This system, known as Artificial Intelligence (AI), works by "invading the subconscious" of social media users. As Van Dijk explains, the control of the mind through discourse practices is the second form of power, after the control of context and text structure [10]. This movie illustrates how the use of social media becomes difficult to control because of the messages that the algorithm system displays on the device screen, be it notifications, friend recommendations, or advertisements in the form of text, videos, or images.

Unconsciously, when users are engrossed in surfing social media, the algorithm system continues to record every activity, from images, posts viewed, to the duration of observation. This recorded information is then used by the algorithm to make content recommendations that users might like. This is what makes users constantly open recommendations and “drown” in the hypnosis of the artificial intelligence system. This phenomenon is in line with Tristan Harris’ (one of the movie’s interviewees) statement that social media makes users addicted like playing a slot machine. The randomness of the rewards (for example, five new likes) makes the experience highly addictive, encouraging users to keep refreshing the homepage.

The movie The Social Dilemma showcases the concerns of former workers of social media giants (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat) about the algorithms they develop themselves are now difficult to control and have a significant impact on users. These impacts are often difficult to identify by the users themselves. For example, the movie shows a graph of the increase in suicide deaths among young women (Figure 1.6), symbolically attributing the increase to the emergence of social media. Feelings of insecurity due to negative comments and lack of likes on posts can be misinterpreted as personal flaws, lowering confidence and leading to mental health issues such as depression.

The collection of personal data is also an impact represented in the movie. Algorithms gradually collect user data based on usage history, until they have complete information to keep users on social media (Figures 4.3 and 4.9). Content recommendations and advertisements that appear based on what users often observe and like create an endless loop, where the longer users surf, the more data is captured and potentially sold to advertising companies.

The role of users as social media “objects” in this movie is very much in line with Michel Foucault’s Panopticon concept. The Panopticon is a surveillance structure in which cell dwellers feel constantly watched, so they automatically comply and are disciplined, even though the supervisor is not always actively watching [11]. This model is similar to the social media algorithm system described by the interviewees, where users unconsciously feel monitored and controlled. Some manifestations of Panopticon-like social media “power” in controlling its users include:

- **Content Recommendations:** Influences users by presenting relevant content, increasing engagement, but also creating a bubble filter that restricts views (Figure 4.11).
- **Notifications:** A message that informs the user, but constantly interrupts concentration (Figures 4.4, 4.14).
- **“Like” button:** A feature that shows appreciation, but can become a measure of popularity, cause feelings of inadequacy, influence decisions, create dependency, trigger unfair competition, and encourage unhealthy behavior (Figures 4.6, 4.17).
- **Advertising Recommendations:** Promote products/services and target audiences, but have the potential to violate privacy, be manipulative, create imbalance, and cause saturation (Figure 4.3).

From the description above, it is clear that social media has unconsciously controlled the psyche and emotions of its users, creating a big dilemma. While facilitating ease of activity, social media also “imprisons” people in the digital world. The movie The Social Dilemma provides valuable lessons, showing that movies are not only entertainment, but also a source of learning and experience, relevant to plot theory and the concept of the Panopticon [12,13].

Conclusion

Based on the narrative analysis of the film, the events depicted in The Social Dilemma are a strong cause-and-effect relationship, where the statements of the interviewees (cause) are effectively supported by the illustrations of the story played by the actors (effect).

The movie The Social Dilemma specifically illustrates several aspects of the dilemma of using social media, namely:

1. There is unacknowledged surveillance by social media users of their online activities.
2. Extensive recording of personal data and information.
3. The manipulation of social media interfaces, such as notification systems, friend recommendations, and advertising systems, are designed to keep people “stuck” in social media.

Therefore, the movie implicitly invites its audience to raise awareness in the use of social media to be wiser and smarter. Otherwise, users risk continuing to be “enslaved” by the algorithmic system that runs social media. This is the essence of the dilemma of using social media.

At the heart of this dilemma lies the power of social media that effectively “imprisons” and controls its users. This power manifests in the form of notifications, content recommendations, advertising recommendations, and the “like” button feature.

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