

# Surveillance Capitalism Discourse (Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis In "The Social Dilemma" Film)

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## Surveillance Capitalism Discourse (Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis In "The Social Dilemma" Film)

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### Abstract

<sup>22</sup> The Social Dilemma" is a documentary that uncovers the hidden machinations behind social media and search platforms. Therefore, this thesis aims to find out how the discourse of supervisory capitalism is shown in the film, as well as determine its microstructure, mesostructure, and macrostructure.

<sup>8</sup> This is a qualitative research with a Critical Discourse Analysis model by Norman Fairclough comprising a multi-dimensional unit, such as text, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice used for analysis. Furthermore, Jäger and Maier's model and a dispositive cycle of films showing dialogue, thought, actions or gestures, and discourse materialization were also utilized. Data were collected through observations, interviewing film directors, and related literature. The theory used is Shosana Zuboff's Surveillance Capitalism Theory and is supported by Karl Marx's concepts of Alienation and False Consciousness.

From the analysis results, it is found that "The Social Dilemma" is a film that discloses the discourse of resistance to supervisory capitalism. These are identified through text indicating the availability of tech industry practices (social media), dispossession cycles, instilling false awareness, and data exploitation. The practice of discourse is also revealed through interviews with the director and the responses obtained from the audience as consumers of the work. The supervisory capitalism discourse contained in the film is also motivated by interrelated socio-cultural factors.

**Keywords:** Documentary Film, The Social Dilemma; Critical Discourse Analysis; Surveillance Capitalism; Social Media

### Introduction

In every technological development, the media encounters certain transformations as a means of communication. The change from old to new media implies that presently, the audiences are not only regarded as objects. In fact, they are also perceived as the target of the messages being delivered. This has caused them to become more interactive. There are social networking sites where content, such as profiles, activities, and even user opinions, are published and provide space for interactive communication.

Based on data released by We Are Social with Hootsuite, it was discovered that 5.22 billion people, equivalent to 66.6% of the world's total population as of January 2021, are currently using mobile phones. In addition, 4.66 billion have internet access, while last year, it was relatively 316 million (7.3%). Global internet penetration also currently reaches 59.5%. The number of social media users has increased 490 million in the past 12 months, with an average annual growth of approximately 13%. Additionally, social media users exceed 53% of the world's population.

The data presented simply indicates that technological advances significantly affect the

level of interaction in the digital world. The audience is a collection of individuals who are free to share their experiences, besides they are not limited by geographical factors. They also consist of various layers and heterogeneous social categories and play two roles at once, namely consumers and producers of information.

Thanks to the continuous technological advancement, another sector that is experiencing rapid growth is the film industry, including documentaries. It is characterized by the filmmakers' abilities to ensure that the audience is not only aware of the topics being discussed but also is able to understand and empathize with the problems presented by the subjects in the film. Therefore, documentaries are often used as a medium to convey criticism due to their closeness to data and facts.

One of the films that critically describes the reality of the modern era is "The Social Dilemma" by Jeff Orlowski. It tries to explore how technology companies have provided a lot of inspiration, excitement, and connection for their users in the past few decades. Social media products and services have been woven into the lives of billions of people and have made the world a better place. However, another side has been overlooked by its users, such as how social networks consume people's time without their knowledge and various other negative impacts.

In view of criticism, the media industry has ignored the fact that the audience seemed to be entertained while not being aware that there is a price to be paid. Finally, social media, considered a bright spot in this modern era, is nothing more than an institution driven by economic logic related to how data is sold to influence and manipulate its users. In connection with the previous description, the discourse on the relationship between technology, social media, and capitalism becomes the background of the unrest that deserves to be investigated from a communication perspective.

## Literature Review

### Introduction to media

Technology has contributed to the creation of media diversity. (Straubhaar et al., 2018) reported changes in terminology regarding the media. These are related to technological developments, area coverage, mass production, distribution, and diverse effects. In addition, the media is presently defined from a broader perspective.

McLuhan's ideas reflected in the Classical Medium Theory stimulated the birth of a novel thought known as New Media Theory. In 1990, Mark Poster published a book entitled "The Second Media Age," which emphasized a new period of interactive technology and network communication, especially the Internet. The New Media Theory covers several areas, namely power, and inequality, social integration, and identity, as well as social change and development (McLuhan, 1994)

Meanwhile, according to (Vivian, 2014), the existence of new media, such as the Internet, goes beyond the pattern of spreading traditional messages. It interacts with blurring geographical boundaries, interaction capacity, and most importantly can be performed in real-time. (Gane & Beer, 2008) describe the characteristics of new media with the terms network, information, interface, archive, interactive, and simulation. These characteristics are further explained as follows:

1. Many sources to several audiences.
2. Communication is reciprocal or two-way.
3. Closed and free control of the media and other sources, respectively.
4. Media facilitates every audience (citizens).
5. The audience is perceived according to their diverse characters and identities.

6. New media involves public experience in space and time.

Holmes (2005: 10) divided the media into two from a historical perspective. This includes the first and second media ages with broadcasting and interactive patterns, as shown in the table. However, the terms 'old' and 'new' media seem to cause controversies among academics and practitioners. This is because the word 'new' means replacing and eliminating the 'old' items or habits. Even though there are certain differences, it does not mean that these two media types are shifting their presence from one another.

### Cyber world and social media

The word cyber is widely used to describe the reality of new media. This concept was originally introduced in the science-fiction novel entitled *True Name*, written by Vernor in 1981. Vernor used the term "The Other Plane" to describe the existence of a network. Furthermore, this concept was popularized by William Gibson in 1984 in his novel "Neuromancer," who got the idea after observing children playing video games.

It was discovered that the children believed that the game was real and that all buildings, spaces, interactions, and objects were a reality, despite not being able to reach them. Gibson then introduced the term "cyberspace" and explained that certain places are not accurate, although their existence can be felt.

In line with the earlier mentioned definition, Bromberg (1996) equates cyberspace as a "non-linear reality of mind-altering drugs." Meanwhile, Rushkoff (1994) uses the word to bring the mind to the next level of human consciousness. All these definitions try to explain that the cyber world is perceived as a reality in the minds of individuals.

For example, how people comment on posts uploaded through social media pages,

even though they are not in the same space or asynchronous position. Furthermore, it is as though they have a face-to-face conversation daily, and the parties involved tend to feel emotional when these messages are read.

<sup>6</sup> Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that enables the creation and exchange of user-generated content. It is undeniable that any interaction that occurs on social media is due to technology and the ideology behind its fabrication.

<sup>27</sup> Apps like Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, which were not even in existence a few decades ago, are essential to the present-day media and communications landscape. Facebook, launched in 2004, connects people from all over the world, not to mention its expansion with WhatsApp and Instagram, which later merged to form Meta Platforms Inc in 2021. YouTube, founded in 2005, processes more than three billion monthly searches, making it the second largest search engine after Google.

<sup>26</sup> All this simply indicates that social media is no longer perceived as just entertainment for the younger generation. It impacts everyone, consumers and organizations, business executives, consultants, politicians, entertainers, educators, and ordinary people trying to understand<sup>7</sup> and discover the best way to take advantage of the various social media applications available in the 'present' online market. This also leverages data availability from social media applications.

### Surveillance capitalism

Technological advances based on the Internet of things have made human existence easier. Without realizing it, the usage habit translates into valuable data for digital businesses. This led to the emergence of a new paradigm or face of capitalism. In the digital world, people use

various programs to efficiently help them in their daily activities. Starting from displaying travel routes to places that have never been visited, obtaining products or services through applications, meeting agendas stored in the calendar, and others. Moreover, digital devices and the Internet are often perceived as useful tools that the users can completely control.

In this scenario, most people often fail to understand that using any app on a smartphone or other devices automatically gives the program permission to view their data. Examples include approving access to photo galleries, videos, contacts, and anything else stored on the user's device. Another example is the digital map program on the user's device, which, if closely examined, contains a record of their journey to various destinations such as home, work, restaurants, including other sites. At the same time, all of that falls into user privacy, which is unwittingly shared with app developers.

However, if deeply analyzed, consumers' private space seems smaller when everything is shared in cyberspace because there are third parties who monitor users' activities. The issue is that all these actions and habits are perceived as valuable assets used as 'raw materials' by third parties to regulate certain behavior, including these users' economic, social, and even political choices.

<sup>15</sup> In the book "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism," Zuboff focuses on the economic consequences of implementing surveillance capitalism. The major digital companies growing in the United States, were observed and five technology firms selected, Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft, and the most notable, Google with search engine features incorporated into the Android system presently integrated in virtually all smartphones worldwide. Interestingly, Zuboff asserts that Google is the pioneer of surveillance capitalism. User search histories, voicemails, trip map route traces, and email contacts are

converted into data which is then sold to other digital companies as commodities.

It should be noted that presently, the development of knowledge concerning the surveillance capitalism concept is still minimal. Even the use of the term in Indonesian translation is considered ambiguous and occasionally causes confusion. Many people presume it is a form of capitalism being monitored. Even though this definition is far from that, surveillance capitalism is a model that 'spies' on all activities and uses the Internet to generate profits.

One of the first comprehensive references to surveillance capitalism was written by Shoshana Zuboff, who studied and interpreted the diverse pattern of gadgets and internet users in his book entitled "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power" which was published in 2019. This Harvard Business School graduate professor expressed his concern for the future amid information proliferation through this 704-page book. Zuboff highlighted several businesses, such as Google and Facebook, that control information and digital technology.

Interestingly, Zuboff coined the phrase "surveillance capitalism" to describe how individuals have become commodities. He further proposed the theory of Karl Marx, which was perceived as a factor that causes people to be alienated from themselves due to the type of work they perform. Meanwhile, humans are alienated in surveillance capitalism, not because of their work but because a third party manages their personal domain (Zuboff, 2019: 9).

Zuboff asserted that users of digital platforms are often trapped in four stages called the "dispossession cycle." These phases consist of incursion, habituation, adaptation, and redirection. Each one runs gradually and keeps on turning like an endless cycle (Zuboff, 2019: 140–154). To make it easier to understand the

complex concept of "surveillance capitalism," Zuboff provided a simple explanation of the overall pattern of this theory.

**1**  
Business model: Google and other surveillance-based platforms are often described as "two-side markets" or platforms where direct interaction occurs between two or more economic actors who mutually benefit from each other through a continuous value creation process. However, the mechanism of surveillance capitalism tends to be different. Google has found a way to translate non-economic user interactions into raw materials for behavioral surplus to be used as data products to execute market transactions with advertisers, who are perceived as real customers.

The introduction of external behavioral surpluses into the market ultimately enables firms to convert an investment into income. The raw materials that emerge from the non-economic online activities of the users allow corporations to generate profits from the invisible zero marginal costs successfully. Initially, it was "accidentally discovered" as a by-product or "remaining data" of the user's search action. However, after realizing their potentials, these assets were then hunted aggressively by monitoring the data. If industrial capitalism turns natural resources into commodities, then surveillance lays its claim on human nature and behavior.

**1**  
Means of production: Google's manufacturing process is an unprecedented component of capitalism history. A specific technological technique called "machine intelligence" is constantly evolving, and its complexity is getting increasingly intimidating. For example, Google has been described as the initiator and developer of "artificial intelligence" since at least 2003. The term itself is dynamic because of its ability to evolve from a primitive program used for playing simple games to a system that can operate a driverless car.

The more surplus that is consumed, the more accurate the prediction ability will be. Meanwhile, the company platform is committed to developing its artificial intelligence capabilities solely to improve its search features' accuracy. This is likely to be used to continue developing its evolving artificial intelligence capabilities. It is presumed that machine intelligence is a means of production in surveillance capitalism. More and more companies are chasing profits in Google's surveillance style with predictive products that increase click-through rates (CTR) for targeted ads. Such contributions equate to 21st-century capitalism's expensive, sophisticated, opaque, and exclusive "means of production."

Product: Machine intelligence processes behavioral surpluses into predictive products designed to envisage people's thoughts, and future intentions. Incidentally, this method is one of Google's most closely guarded secrets. The nature of its products explains why this application has repeatedly claimed that it does not sell personal data. Google executives always insist on the transparency of their privacy because they don't sell their raw materials. Instead, the company sells predictions that can only be made from surplus user behaviors.

Predictive products protect customers from risks by creating awareness concerning where and when to place bets. Product quality and competitiveness are a function of its approach to certainty. The better the predictive product, the lesser the risk advertisers are exposed to and the greater the sales volume. Google is a data-driven forecaster that replaces intuition with science on a large scale to benefit advertisers. Initially, its predictive products were mainly targeted at advertising, although this was only the beginning of the surveillance capitalism project.

**1**  
Marketplace: Predictive products are sold in a new market that trades exclusively on human behavior. The main advantage of

surveillance capitalism emerges from this kind of marketplace. Irrespective of advertisers being the dominant players, there are no boundaries in this market. The new prediction system deals only with advertising, although it is also applicable to several other areas. Any financier interested in purchasing probabilistic information about users' future behavior can make payment in a marketplace where that of individuals, groups, and organizations are exposed and sold.

### Critical discourse analysis

Discourse is a social praxis in symbolic interaction expressed through speech, writing, gestures, pictures, diagrams, films, or music (Bloor, 2006:6-7). Foucault stated that it is more than just a series of words or propositions in a text but produces something comprehensive that includes concepts, opinions, and ideas. Discourse is also categorized as an interpretive theory that focuses on meaningful issues.

Jorgensen (2007: 117) stated that discourse is a kind of praxis that comprises other social activities. Language is always involved in power relations, especially in shaping the subject and representational behavior in society. Therefore, its critical analysis examines language from a linguistic point of view and also in relation to the context of social conditions.

There are several models in critical discourse analysis developed by CDA thinkers, one of which is Norman Fairclough, who

proposed three dimensions, namely text, discourse, and socio-cultural practices. A detailed explanation is reported as follows:

1. The text is disassembled linguistically because it portrays how reality is displayed or produced, thereby leading to a certain ideology, as well as how the author constructs his relationship with the reader in a formal, informal, closed, or open system. This is in addition to how an identity is presented and used as a form of representation in respect to a certain ideology.
2. The practice of discourse is an aspect of textual production and consumption. The text generator process is related to personal experiences, knowledge, habits, social environment, conditions, circumstances, context, and other factors peculiar to the writer. Meanwhile, the text consumption is influenced by the author's experience, expertise, and various social situations, including the reader or viewer. How can someone accept the text presented by the creator? This is related to the distribution of the text, which involves the maker's capital and effort put into his work, to ensure it is accepted by the community.
3. Socio-cultural praxis is a dimension related to external contexts not included in the text, such as the situation. Interestingly, societal, cultural, and political contexts affect the existence of the text

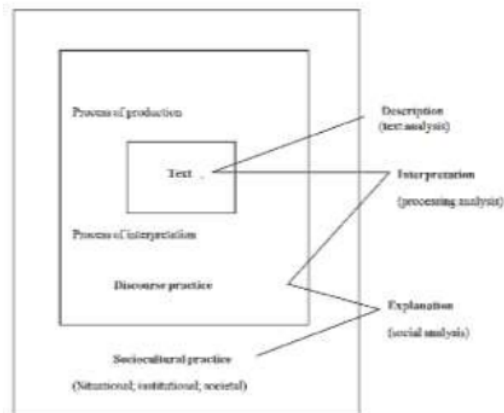


Figure 1.1 Three-dimensional model of CDA

(Source: N. Fairclough, 1995:98)

Meanwhile, in the film, three elements must be discretely discussed, namely discursive, non-discursive, and materialization discourses. The relationship between these three is referred to as dispositive, and inseparable from the meaning of discourse (Haryatmoko, 2019:113). In films, discursive and non-discursive aspects and the materialization of discourse are clearly described compared to other data sources. Furthermore, dispositive CDA directly portrays speech and thoughts as discursive practices in films, while actions or gestures are perceived as non-discursive activities. The representation

built through non-discursive practices is the materialization of discourse.

According to Jäger (2009: 57), a dispositive analysis is carried out first by reconstructing the knowledge built in discursive practice (through CDA). Second, reconstructing the knowledge built in non-discursive practices. Third, reconstruct knowledge built from materialization into objects and non-discursive practices. The dispositive concept of discourse proposed by Jäger is in the form of a rotating triangle with three stopping points, as shown in the following diagram



Figure 1.2 CDA on Film

(Source: Jäger & Maier, 2009)

The relation of the three elements in a triangular form changes over time. Historically, it has always been influenced by other elements, however synchronic analysis is needed to identify the current state. The triangle shows the importance of critical discourse analysis carried out verbally, through actions and materialization, and also these are taken into account in films.

### Research Method

A qualitative approach with a Critical Discourse Analysis model proposed by Norman Fairclough and a multi-dimensional unit consisting of text, discursive, and socio-cultural practices were employed in this research. This was supported by adopting Jäger and Maier's Critical Discourse Analysis model with the dispositive cycle of films that show dialogue and thoughts, actions or gestures, and discourse materialization. Data were collected by observing film content, interview sessions held with directors, and reviewing related literature.

### Analysis

After showing a scene from the film "The Social Dilemma," Jäger and Maier's analysis model was used to view the cinematography, source gestures, and discourse materialization. In this section, the film's textual dimensions, discursive, and socio-cultural practices were discussed with respect to Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method.

#### 1. Microstructure (Textual Dimension)

The author analyzes certain texts that show the construction of surveillance capitalism to reveal their actual values. These include the value of representation, relations, and identity.

##### a. Value of Representation

The value of representation refers to the way and manner social reality, such as people, groups, situations, and circumstances, are displayed in texts which generally possess certain ideological contents. As a documentary film that highly criticizes social media, *The Social Dilemma* often depicts surveillance capitalism with negative justifications.

The diction or vocabulary used in a text is mainly related to how certain groups, people, or events are categorized in a particular set. All of these lead to a specific association that aligns with the supposed reality. The choice of words not only gives rise to different realities but also, a particular incident can be described differently.

According to Fairclough and Eriyanto (2001:292), the choice of diction and metaphor is the key to distinguishing these realities from one another. In addition to giving the impression of art in a text, diction and metaphor can determine whether reality is interpreted and categorized as either negative or positive.

In selecting the diction in a book entitled *The Social Dilemma*, the uniqueness of the text is centered on how technology and social media are portrayed as having a bad influence on the society, which is perceived as the victim. The words "spell" (magic), "drugs" (drugs), and "slot machine" (slot machine) are associated with blinding and addictive social media.

Then the choice of words such as "threat" (threat) and "checkmate"

(checkmate) depicts reality, especially when social media is part of human existence and is considered a threat. Meanwhile, the vocabularies that describe social media users are "lab rats" (test mice), "zombies," and "digital Frankenstein," and these signify the absence of human reasoning and consciousness.

Apart from the words in the clauses used by the actors during dialogues, the value of representation is also revealed through an audio creation in the form of a soundtrack entitled "I Put A Spell on You" by Brandi Carlile. The song has certain lyrics that mean "I have bewitched you" and is included in the scene when Ben is busy doomscrolling.

Music plays an influential role during film-making, and it helps the director set the mood and emotion of a scene. The level of "drama" is determined by the accompanying soundtrack.

#### b. Value of Relationships

Relationships are closely related to how participants in media relations are displayed in the text. The present research distinguishes between two types of relationships exhibited in films.

- Relationship Filmmaker with Sources in Film

In producing a documentary work, openness between filmmakers and participants is essential, especially in the investigative documentary genre. This relationship is viewed through a

documentary approach in the form of participatory and observatory methods selected by the director.

The participatory is evidently seen in short dialogues between the filmmaker and the interviewee, mostly during the interview session. The observatory procedure is viewed from the director's placement as a third person who takes a distance and is not directly involved with the resource person.

- The Relationship of Participants in Film with the Audience

It was discovered that the relationship between the director and the resource person as a participant in the film and the audience was developed through closed text. In semiotic studies, closed texts lead the reader to an intentional interpretation. The audience is not faced with open or free interpretation because the discourse contains certain ideologies.

Throughout the film's production, the director Jeff Orlowski never had a direct relationship with the audience. However when the film was about to end, Jeff made a witty black background with white text that reads, "Follow us on Social Media! Just kidding." It is the only relationship that Jeff Orlowski directly had with the audience.

#### c. Identity Value

The author can be identified by a text, not only by name or other essential information but also by detecting his stance on a particular issue or social group. It also shows the alignment between the text maker and his discourse.

Irrespective of the fact that the director's identity is unknown, it can be discerned through implicit texts or indirect delivery. Some citizenship identities were highlighted, as shown in the several scenes that take place in the United States of America.

Meanwhile, Jeff Orlowski's bias is viewed from how he put together several narrative scenes about the dangers of social media in everyday activities and excerpts from the interview segment. The scene portrayed Jeff's perspective of criticizing the surveillance capitalism system.

## 2. Mesostructure (Discursive Practice)

The analysis of discursive practice focuses on how production and distribution activities emanate from the media's side and the text consumption process from the audience. In this case, the present research analyzes the interview documentation, related contents, and audience reviews.

### a. Creative Production Process

Before it became a complete work, the text first underwent production. This creative process is closely related to work practices ranging from theme finding, writing to editing.

- Selection of Big Themes

Based on an interview held by Talks At Google on June 13, 2021, Jeff Orlowski revealed

his reasons for selecting a documentary theme related to social media technology. Its determination was not directly selected and planned by Orlowski, the idea was actually Tristan Harris', a fellow Stanford alumnus who is also a keynote speaker in the film. Tristan's questions succeeded in making Jeff want to explore the theme.

- Film-making and Writing

During the interview session, Jeff Owloski revealed two steps adopted in completing the script. The Social Dilemma comprises data and facts from the interview sessions held with experts in diverse fields concerned about social media. However, to ensure the discussions are not monotonous, Orlowski added character algorithms, from which the entire narrative was developed.

- Partiality and Ideology of the Director

The present study discovered a uniqueness related to Jeff Orlowski's motivation to work on this documentary closely related to social criticism. This is because it was initially stated that during the course of his career, Jeff often focused on the problem of natural damage. Throughout his directing career, Jeff has worked on two documentaries highlighting nature's destruction, namely Chasing Ice and Corals. Jeff has dedicated his work from

the start to presenting the incessant existential problems. The director can discern that the similarities between environmental and technological issues led to some sort of crisis due to power inequality.

As discussed earlier in the text analysis, Jeff Orlowski's alignment is also be viewed through his creative idea of describing social users as voodoo dolls controlled by algorithms, as shown in Figure 4.8. The director's reasons were also revealed in a recorded interview with Google's film club.

The director consciously builds a framing that describes his personal experience using social media even when he was prohibited from viewing specific content. In addition, the intertextuality contained in the text of *The Social Dilemma* has an influential impact on the alignment of the director.

Every text is the reproduction of previous ones. Some inserted texts help support the representation of the discourse in the film *The Social Dilemma*.

The Matrix that the director uses as a reference is a film that explicitly displays technology as a scary and dangerous object. Meanwhile, in *The Truman Show*, capitalism is presumed to have an unlimited impact on humans. At least these two films have criticized the effect of modern capitalism on the technology industry.

#### b. Film Distribution Process

The *Social Dilemma* process commenced with the screening procedure at the Sundance Film Festival before it was finally purchased by Netflix. Although it is an ironic film that opposes the social media business model screened on a platform with similar intent. In addition, to create awareness globally, *The Social Dilemma* is also released for free on Youtube from August 17 to September 30, 2021. The distribution team also provides discussion guides to analyze social media issues in small communities and additional interview content afterward.

#### c. Film Consumption Process

This section collected reviews from various sources and comments from Facebook regarding *The Social Dilemma*. The consumption process of this film is an important aspect of discourse because it is valuable.

- “The Social Dilemma” Rating

This film received an audience rating of 7.6 out of a scale of one to 10 with a total of 81,307 ratings from the IMDb, a site containing information related to movies, television series, video games, and streaming content, including cast, production crew, and reviews.

The assessment of *The Social Dilemma* can also be viewed on the website *The Rotten Tomatoes*, and this evaluation procedure was divided into two types.

Tomatometer is the rating given by film critics, while ordinary viewers judge Audience Score, these were awarded eighty-five percent and eighty-three percent, respectively.

Similarly, the Metacritic rating system is divided into two parts, namely the Metascore and User Score, which are judged by film critics and ordinary viewers, respectively. The score obtained by *The Social Dilemma* from the general public is 7.7 on a scale of one to 10, while the rating from film critics is 86 on a scale of one to 100. In addition, the overall score of this film was written in green, which implies it has a standard score of 61 or more.

- “The Social Dilemma” Film Review

Furthermore, preliminary studies have collected reviews that are considered to represent the pros and cons, as well as direct responses from Facebook regarding the 'allegations' of the discourse brought about by the film.

- The Social Dilemma Film Review

In a review by film critic Dennis Harvey for *Variety* on January 31, 2020, the movie *The Social Dilemma* was judged as a thesis work wrapped up in 93 minutes. Jeff Orlowski's documentary is full of lively and entertaining content, and it also has broad accessibility with the

addition of a dramatic narrative. It is one of the most talked about documentaries at Sundance this year.

A dramatic narrative featuring city family life plays out throughout the film. It illustrates the impact of social media addiction as well as marks a sharp departure from Jeff Orlowski's previously well-received feature on the environmental crisis. There is no visually boring aspect, as the film provides plenty of sensory stimulation without feeling overwhelming.

- Why *The Social Dilemma* is Wrong

Danielle Newnham uploaded a review on August 27, 2021, through the Medium platform. As someone who works in the technology industry, Danielle believes that the film *The Social Dilemma* is nonsense. After its release last year, the actors called for the special media to be removed or, at least for mobile phone notifications, to be turned off. After more than an hour of proffering diverse solutions, they decided to turn off notifications. This is an irony because films that campaign against social media are actually promoted on the Internet.

2 Conversations about technology, social media, and all modern forms of communication were indeed portrayed, but it is a sensational movie. Like the founders of great technology, these filmmakers also have good intentions. However, the biggest drawback is the imbalanced information sources that create a one-sided opinion on a complex problem.

- Facebook: What 'The Social Dilemma' Gets Wrong

Facebook stated on October 2020, a month after the film *The Social Dilemma* was released. The following statement was made after translation

2 “It is paramount to have conversations about the impact of social media on society. But ‘The Social Dilemma’ buries the substance in sensationalism. Rather than offer a nuanced view of technology, it gives a distorted view of how social media platforms function in creating a convenient scapegoat for difficult and complex societal problems. The film’s creators failed to include insights from those currently working at the companies or experts with a different view

of the narrative put forward. They also failed to critically acknowledge—the efforts already adopted by companies to address the several issues raised. Instead, they relied on commentaries from those who had not been on the inside for many years. Here are the core points the film gets wrong.”

### 3. Macrostructure (Sociocultural Practice)

A socio-cultural analysis assumes that the external social context influences how discourse appears in the media. The production space is not a sterile and neutral field, besides it is largely determined by factors other than itself. These are divided into three sub-levels, which are

#### a. Situational Level

This level leads to a micro atmosphere, namely the context of the event when the text or film is made, in the sense that these are produced under unique conditions. The production of *The Social Dilemma* commenced from 2018 to 2020. At that time, social media was booming in the public spotlight.

Unfortunately, some unfavorable circumstances were reported, such as the Cambridge Analytica case, which has been in court since 2015. This was because Facebook violated data protection laws by failing to keep personal information secure, and the personal data of approximately 87 million people were collected

without their consent. Youtube has also been exposed as a platform that can significantly exacerbate radicalization among young adults. Other platforms, such as Instagram, are also working on addressing millions of accounts with suspicious activities. Likewise, Twitter was filled with harassment, intimidation, racist content, and a platform where political polarization took place.

Then towards the end of 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic that spread to all corners of the world resulted in the prohibition of certain activities and restriction of physical contact throughout the year. This condition led to the rapid use of technology and social media. Mass panic worsened due to the rapid flow of information, also known as an infodemic. Unfortunately, people doomscrolling only exacerbated anxiety. On the other hand, a riot occurred on January 6, 2021, shortly after the United States Presidential election, where a domino effect occurred due to political polarization on social media.

On a national scale, the phenomenon of the "cebong-kampret" led to the division of supporters for the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election into two factions. Although the degrading nicknames are not political identities, these stereotypes are related to the supporters of certain political groups. Their emergence made both camps vulnerable to becoming increasingly radical and turning a blind eye to facts different from their beliefs.

Based on the situational context, The Social Dilemma is based on a discourse like an act of resistance. The action is an attempt to respond to certain societal circumstances.

b. Institutional

The institutional level evaluates the influence of organizational institutions in the practice of discourse production. This tends to emerge from within the media, although it could also be external. The partisanship of discourse can occur due to media, economic or political institutional factors.

Based on the interview excerpt, The Social Dilemma was an independent production, fully funded by the director's production house, Exposure Labs. It focused on creating various films that raise environmental and social issues.

Although produced independently and different from Jeff Orłowski's previous two films, The Social Dilemma was distributed through a large streaming platform (Netflix), therefore, its accessibility was able to penetrate global audiences. As a third party in distributing this movie, Netflix had an enormous impact. Even in less than a month, The Social Dilemma has been watched 38 million times. This proves that Netflix's role as a distribution media has a significant influence.

In the context of political, institutional factors, neither the film's content nor the production house was under any form of

pressure. This is because the film production activities take place in a country that upholds democracy and the right to express opinions. Therefore, it was presumed that the film *The Social Dilemma* is not based on the desire to achieve economic gain and is not shackled by any political institution.

However, the influential external institution is the non-profit organization, referred to as the Center for Humane Technology, which is dedicated to radically reorganizing digital infrastructure. Its mission is to drive a comprehensive shift towards humane technologies that support collective well-being, democracy, and a shared information environment.

The involvement of the organization is perceived as dominant throughout the film. Even Tristan Harris, the key resource person, and the protagonist, is the Center for Humane Technology founder. During the interview sessions held, the director admitted that the original idea and most of the sources in the film were part of this organization.

#### c. Social Level

Social factors have a major influence on the discourse that appears in the text. Fairclough asserted that societal changes determine the discourse that appears in the media. These are usually in the form of political, economic, or cultural systems.

This is presently the social media era, and in 2021 its users

reached 4.20 billion, with an average year-on-year growth of approximately 13%. Recently, the number of social media users has been equivalent to more than half of the world's population. As its usage increases, of course, the culture of the community also changes.

The rapid advancement of contemporary information technology brings global society to a social end. The social process is presently being accelerated and has reached its maximum state in the hands of the Internet, perceived as a product of modernization. This existing reality makes individuals seem to be competing with each other in an arena of duels, contests, challenges, seductions, and temptations of the consumer society (Piliang, 2004: 233).

Although social media is categorized only as entertainment to some people, the pleasure derived from it is embedded and incarnated in human activities, thereby leading to the development of culture. Gradually, the pleasure becomes a greater need, eventually dispersing the people.

In the midst of the onslaught of the Internet of things, the practice of capitalism is increasingly beginning to dominate. A social media culture that allows everyone to be both a producer and a consumer of content places its users as aliens. Exposure to information that affects the consumerism level of its users further strengthens the materialism culture.

Meanwhile, the legal system that regulates social media corporations globally is far from adequate. The many consequences, such as hacking or data theft, polarization and radicalization, racism, online-based bullying or harassment, and many more, do not recede its usage. The lack of strict regulations coupled with the dominance of the capitalist economic system allows some parties to control the social media technology market fully.

This control is not only limited to ownership of capital and production equipment but also controls surplus user data. As a result, individuals have been turned into commodities by claiming human experience as the free "raw material" that sustains these companies.

The film *The Social Dilemma* tries to recreate the recent happenings, while on the other hand, these in turn also inspires the formation of the discourse that the film is trying to present. Therefore, both work and reality are always in a cycle that leads to the formation of one another.

## 8 Conclusions

Based on the results of the discussion realized using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and Jäger & Maier's disposition models to search for a surveillance capitalism discourse constructed in the film *The Social Dilemma*, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Based on the results of the analysis that was carried out using the Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis method assisted by the

Jäger and Maier models, it was concluded that the text, both in spoken and visual form, in the film *The Social Dilemma* does indicate a discourse of surveillance capitalism. The one in this film is conveyed through discursive practice by presenting testimonies from social media experts and practitioners. It was further strengthened through non-discursive practices and materialization of discourse that displays narrative drama and illustrations of the process and impact of using social media.

2. The analysis results show that *The Social Dilemma* is a film that voices the discourse of resistance to surveillance capitalism. This is identified through the microstructure (text), indicating that social media technology industry practices are associated with controlling capital owners, creating false awareness, and exploiting data. At the level of Mesostructure (discourse practice), the partiality of the film was also revealed through interview sessions held with the director and the responses obtained from the audience as consumers of the text. The surveillance capitalism discourse in the movie was also motivated by interrelated macrostructural (socio-cultural) factors that influence each other. It contains an answer or explanation to the problem of research. Moreover, it can also be added to the development prospects of the research and the further application in subsequent studies.

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