



Gatekeeping and the Sociology of Information Management in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This article examines gatekeeping and the sociology of information management in the digital age, with particular attention to the changing location of informational power in networked communication environments. It adopted a qualitative research design hinged on library research and thematic discourse of scholarly literature, recent academic publications, industry reports and relevant institutional documents. Data were gathered from secondary sources to substantiate positions and postulations. The article revolves around digital gatekeeping, sociology of information management and their implications for contemporary communication practice. Findings revealed that the digital age has fundamentally transformed the production, circulation, selection and consumption of information. Whereas traditional mass media operated largely through identifiable institutional gatekeepers such as editors, journalists, broadcasters and publishers, contemporary digital environment distributes gatekeeping functions among professional media organisations, social media users, platform companies, algorithms, artificial intelligence systems, influencers and online communities. It is therefore recommended, among other thing, that platform moderation is an imperative measure to checkmate excesses. Again, it recommends stronger institutional mechanisms for transparency, ethical digital information management and continuous professional development for information and media practitioners.

Keywords: Gatekeeping, Information, Sociology, Information Age, Information Management, Digital Media, Media Sociology

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has modified the pattern and dynamics of information gateways, control and distribution (Vivek, 2026). Information, once managed primarily through centralized institutions such as newspapers, television stations, libraries, universities, and government agencies, now flows through decentralized digital networks characterized by speed, interactivity, and global accessibility. The rise of social media, AI, search engines, and algorithmic communication has fundamentally altered societal information management and dismantled traditional gatekeeping mechanisms. Gatekeeping refers to the process through which information is selected, filtered, shaped, and disseminated to audiences. Traditionally, gatekeepers included journalists, editors, publishers, government officials, and institutional communicators who determined which information entered public discourse. In the digital age, however, gatekeeping has evolved into a hybrid process involving algorithms, digital platforms, influencers, automated recommendation systems, and online communities. In addition, content moderation, while increasingly shaped by platform-specific policies, is also supported by algorithmic systems, which help determine what content can or cannot circulate or be made visible Leerssen (2023).

Information management sociology examines how social structures, cultural systems, institutions, and power dynamics govern the life cycle of information. In modern digital societies, this intersects directly with surveillance, algorithmic control, data ownership, digital inequality, and platform governance. While digital technologies have democratized content creation by empowering citizens to produce and share information, they have simultaneously amplified threats like misinformation, algorithmic bias, digital monopolies, and



privacy risks. Consequently, gatekeeping has shifted from institutional editors to underlying technological and algorithmic infrastructures that discreetly steer public sentiment and social behavior.

Major digital platform companies—such as Amazon, Meta, and Google—act as powerful gatekeepers that dominate markets and reshape consumer behavior by facilitating high-value exchanges between producers and consumers (Van Alstyne et al., 2016). Beyond market dominance, these platforms exert significant control over information access, public discourse, and socio-economic activities (Gilbert et al., 2024). As Rilinger (2024) notes, organizations rely on algorithmic management systems that analyze user engagement—such as likes, comments, and shares—to dictate the visibility, prioritization, and overall flow of digital content.

By leveraging vast troves of user demographic, behavioral, and preference data, platform gatekeepers selectively prioritize and filter content flows (Alexiadis & De Streel, 2020; Theocharis et al., 2023). This granular data enables highly targeted messaging, advertising, and political campaigns capable of swaying public sentiment and voter behavior (Aytac, 2024; Zuboff, 2019). Consequently, this shift in information management introduces crucial sociological concerns regarding power dynamics, structural inequality, transparency, democratic integrity, and social control.

Despite gatekeeping's centrality to corporate communication, theoretical frameworks face a critical disconnect from contemporary practice. Traditional models assume a linear, top-down sequence vis: an information source, a human gatekeeper, and a recipient. In today's digital ecosystem, this linearity has collapsed. Although Nigerian corporations invest heavily in controlling their information environment, official messaging is routinely distorted, suppressed by algorithms, or overridden by influencers and citizen gatekeepers—as evidenced by viral financial and telecommunications hoaxes on WhatsApp and X.

Furthermore, current literature inadequately addresses the power dynamics introduced by non-human gatekeepers. While Global North scholarship has examined algorithmic gatekeeping, empirical research in Sub-Saharan Africa remains scarce regarding how corporations negotiate and coexist with automated systems. Existing models emphasize stakeholder engagement over the sociological dimensions of selection, power, and reality construction. This study addresses the obsolescence of classic gatekeeping models by developing a sociologically grounded framework for information management tailored to Nigeria's digital corporate landscape. This article examines gatekeeping and the sociology of information management in the digital age by evaluating shifting gatekeeping structures, the emergence of algorithmic governance, the role of digital platforms, and the broader sociological implications of information control in networked societies.

Thematic Questions

The following thematic questions serve as a guide to main discourse in this article:

1. What is extent of the transformation of gatekeeping from traditional editorial control to distributed and algorithmic gatekeeping?
2. What are the sociological factors that influence information management in contemporary digital communication environments?
3. What are the implications of contemporary gatekeeping and information-management practices for information credibility, accessibility, participation and accountability?

Conceptual Review

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is the process through which information is filtered, selected, modified, and disseminated before reaching audiences. The concept was first introduced by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1947 and later expanded by communication scholars to explain how news organizations determine what information becomes public knowledge. In media studies, gatekeeping traditionally referred to editorial decisions concerning news selection, framing, prioritization, and exclusion. Editors and journalists acted as institutional gatekeepers



responsible for maintaining professional standards and controlling information flow. However, digital technologies have transformed gatekeeping into a decentralized and algorithmic process.

Traditional gatekeeping was characterized by centralized control of information. Newspapers, television stations, radio organizations, and publishing institutions served as primary gatekeepers responsible for determining which information entered public discourse. Gatekeepers operated according to professional ethics, editorial standards, organizational policies, and societal expectations. The process was hierarchical and institutionally regulated. Traditional gatekeeping promoted professional accountability and information verification but also limited public participation in information production.

Digital gatekeeping now involves search engines, recommendation algorithms, social media platforms, artificial intelligence systems, and online influencers who shape visibility and access to information in digital environments. Recent studies demonstrate that algorithmic gatekeeping increasingly determines what users see online, thereby influencing political perceptions, social attitudes, and public discourse (Damião, Í., Reis, J. M., Almeida, P., Santos, N., & Gonçalves-Sá, J. (2025)

Information Management

Information Management is the systematic process of acquiring, organizing, storing, retrieving, protecting, sharing, and disposing of information to support organizational goals and decision-making (Senam, 2026). It involves ensuring that the right information reaches the right people at the right time and in the appropriate format. Information management encompasses both physical and digital information resources. It includes managing paper records, electronic databases, digital archives, cloud storage, websites, enterprise information systems, and communication platforms. Information management and effective communication constitute the very basis of democratic governance in any society (Senam and Udo, 2015). Despite the importance of information gathering, management and dissemination, people's access to information of significance is, and has always been low. Effective information management ensures that information remains accurate, secure, accessible, and useful throughout its life cycle. The information management process generally includes information creation, collection, classification, storage, indexing, retrieval, distribution, utilization, preservation, archiving, and eventual disposal according to established policies and legal requirements. Modern information management relies heavily on information technologies such as database management systems, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, enterprise resource planning systems, content management systems, cybersecurity tools, and digital record management software.

Sociology of Information Management

The sociology of information management examines how social structures, institutions, cultures, and technological systems influence information production, dissemination, access, storage, and control within society. It explores the relationship between information systems and social power. Information management in the digital age extends beyond administrative data handling to include data governance, digital surveillance, platform regulation, algorithmic systems, and network communication structures. Sociologists analyze how information technologies shape social interaction, institutional authority, inequality, identity formation, and democratic participation. Information is a source of social power. Those who control information infrastructures often shape political narratives, cultural values, and economic opportunities. In the digital societies, informational power is concentrated within large technology corporations that manage search engines, social media platforms, cloud infrastructures, and digital advertising systems. The implication of this to the society is the concentration of informational control which creates new forms of digital inequality and technological dependency.

Although digital technologies expand access to information, inequalities persist regarding internet connectivity, digital literacy, technological infrastructure, and algorithmic visibility.

Digital inequality affects marginalized populations disproportionately, limiting participation in digital communication and information economies. The sociology of information management therefore examines



how social class, geography, education, and economic status influence digital access and informational opportunities.

The digital age has created unprecedented volumes of information. Individuals are constantly exposed to news updates, advertisements, social media content, and digital notifications. With the use of electronic gadgets, the speed with which information spreads is alarming. Through technologies both information overload reduces users' ability to critically evaluate information quality and authenticity. As a result of little or no sensorship, misinformation spreads rapidly within digital networks.

Gatekeeping mechanisms are therefore essential for maintaining informational credibility and social stability.

Digital communication systems have intensified the spread of misinformation and disinformation across societies. Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information shared without malicious intent, while disinformation involves deliberately deceptive information intended to manipulate public opinion. The decentralized nature of digital communication enables misinformation to spread rapidly through social media networks, online communities, and algorithmic amplification. Research on digital misinformation highlights the sociotechnical challenges associated with online information disorder, including ideological polarization, propaganda, and manipulation of public discourse (Puska et al., 2024). Digital gatekeepers often struggle to balance freedom of expression with content moderation responsibilities.

From what is viewed, watched or listed to, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become central to digital information management. AI systems analyze user behavior, automate content moderation, detect misinformation, and personalize digital experiences. AI-driven gatekeeping enhances efficiency but also raises ethical concerns regarding bias, accountability, transparency, and discrimination. Algorithmic systems may reinforce existing social inequalities because they are often trained on biased datasets that reproduce societal prejudices. The sociology of information management therefore emphasizes the need for ethical AI governance and transparent algorithmic systems.

Digital surveillance refers to the monitoring and collection of personal data through digital technologies. Governments, corporations, and institutions increasingly use surveillance systems for security, governance, marketing, and behavioral prediction. Surveillance capitalism has emerged as a dominant economic model in which user data is commodified for commercial profit. Sociologists argue that digital surveillance reshapes social behavior because individuals modify their actions when they know they are being monitored. Grisold et al., (2024) emphasized that digital surveillance has become normalized within organizational systems and digital infrastructures.

Digital platforms collect extensive user data, often without adequate transparency or informed consent. Privacy concerns include unauthorized data sharing, identity theft, cybercrime, and misuse of personal information. Algorithms may reproduce social discrimination based on race, gender, class, or political orientation. Biased recommendation systems can marginalize certain groups while amplifying dominant perspectives.

Many digital gatekeeping systems operate opaquely, making it difficult for users to understand how information is filtered or prioritized. Scholars argue for transparent and accountable digital governance structures that protect democratic participation and informational fairness (Albu & Christensen, 2024).

Digital communication technologies have transformed democratic participation by enabling citizen journalism, online activism, and political engagement. Social media platforms facilitate political mobilization and public discourse. However, they also contribute to polarization, propaganda, and manipulation. Algorithmic gatekeeping may distort democratic processes by amplifying sensational content, misinformation, and ideological extremism. The sociology of information management therefore examines how digital communication influences democratic institutions, political culture, and civic participation.

According to Jarke and Büchner (2024), contemporary organizations increasingly rely on "data care arrangements" that integrate technological infrastructures with social practices of data management and organizational coordination.



Digital Gatekeeping

The digital age refers to the contemporary period characterized by the extensive use of digital technologies, internet connectivity, datafication, artificial intelligence, and network communication systems. It is marked by rapid information exchange, digital interactivity, globalization, and technological convergence. The digital age has transformed communication from a one-way institutional process into an interactive, participatory, and decentralized network system where users simultaneously function as content consumers and producers.

Digital gatekeeping is the process of filtering, selecting, and controlling information, content, or access within online platforms. It determines what content becomes visible or popular, shifting from traditional editorial choices to a mix of algorithmic curation, user interaction, and platform policies. The digital revolution has transformed gatekeeping into a decentralized process involving multiple actors and technologies. Social media platforms, bloggers, influencers, search engines, and artificial intelligence systems now participate in information filtering and dissemination.

The rise of citizen journalism and participatory media has weakened the monopoly of traditional media institutions. Individuals can now create and distribute information globally without institutional mediation.

However, this democratization has also intensified misinformation, fake news, and information disorder. Studies indicate that digital gatekeeping has shifted from editorial control to algorithmic prioritization and platform governance (Gilbert et al., 2024).

Algorithms now play a major role in determining information visibility online. Social media feeds, search engine results, video recommendations, and targeted advertisements are managed through algorithmic systems designed to maximize engagement and profitability.

Algorithmic gatekeeping influences public opinion by prioritizing specific information while suppressing alternative perspectives. These systems often operate invisibly, making users unaware of how their information environment is constructed.

Research shows that digital platforms personalize search results based on browsing history, location, and user preferences, thereby shaping ideological exposure and public understanding (Damião et al., 2025).

Digital platforms such as Google, Meta, and X function as global gatekeepers that regulate information access and online participation. These platforms establish community guidelines, moderation policies, recommendation systems, and advertising rules that shape digital communication. Scholars argue that such corporations possess unprecedented informational and political power because they control digital infrastructures and user data (Gilbert et al., 2024). Platform governance raises concerns regarding censorship, monopolization, transparency, accountability, and democratic control.

These digital platforms has brought about concepts such as datafication and Surveillance. Datafication is the process of transforming social actions and daily life into quantified, digital data, such as converting location, browsing habits, or interactions into data points. Surveillance (specifically *dataveillance*) uses this data for continuous monitoring, tracking, and prediction of human behavior by corporations or governments. Hence, the sociology of information management in the digital age is increasingly shaped by datafication the transformation of social activities into quantifiable digital data. Organizations collect massive amounts of user data to predict behavior, personalize content, and optimize engagement. This process has contributed to digital surveillance systems that monitor online activities, communication patterns, and social interactions. Recent research highlights how digital surveillance has become embedded within organizational and institutional structures, affecting workplace management, governance, and social behavior (Grisold et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Gatekeeping Theory

This study is anchored on two theories vis Gatekeeping Theory and Network Society theory. Gatekeeping



theory is a mass communication concept that allows individuals to filter relevant information, helping them manage the overwhelming amount of data available. Originally proposed by Kurt Lewin in 1943, the theory emphasizes the role of editors in determining newsworthiness and acts as a form of social control. An example illustrates how media focus varies by region, affecting audience interest and engagement.

Gatekeeping Theory explains how information is filtered and controlled before reaching the public. The theory emphasizes that information dissemination is shaped by institutional routines, professional norms, organizational interests, and social influences.

Traditional gatekeeping involved editors, journalists, and institutional communicators who selected news content based on professional criteria such as relevance, objectivity, and public interest. In the digital age, gatekeeping has expanded beyond human actors to include algorithms, recommendation systems, and digital platforms.

Contemporary digital gatekeeping differs from traditional gatekeeping because algorithmic systems automatically personalize and prioritize information based on user behavior, engagement metrics, and platform objectives. This transformation has created concerns regarding information bias, echo chambers, and ideological polarization. This theory is relevance to this work in that it helps to explain the traditional gatekeeping processes before the advent of social media. It also explains who controls the flow of information, how they do it, and why it matters even when the gatekeepers change.

Network Society Theory

Manuel Castells developed the Network Society Theory in the 1996 to explain how digital communication technologies restructure social organization and power relations. The theory postulates that advances in information and communication technologies have created a new social structure where social organization, production, and power operate through global networks. According to the theory, contemporary society operates through interconnected digital networks that shape economic, political, and cultural activities.

In network societies, information becomes a strategic resource controlled through digital infrastructures. Power resides not merely in institutions but in the ability to control communication networks and information flows. Social media corporations, search engines, and digital platforms therefore function as central nodes of informational power. The theory is relevant to this paper as it helps explain how global technology corporations exercise influence through algorithmic governance and digital infrastructures, it discusses a shift from industrial to informational society.

METHODOLOGY

The article adopted a qualitative research design. Specifically, it employed a library-based qualitative approach involving systematic examination and thematic synthesis of scholarly literature, academic publications, institutional reports and relevant policy documents on gatekeeping, digital journalism, information management, algorithms, social media and digital-platform governance. The choice of qualitative design was appropriate because the study seeks to understand concepts, processes, relationships and meanings rather than measure variables statistically.

Data were obtained from secondary sources. These included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, research reports, institutional publications and authoritative digital-policy documents. Particular attention was given to recent literature published between 2023 and 2026, while foundational works were retained to provide theoretical continuity. Among the contemporary sources examined were the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report, UNESCO's guidelines on digital-platform governance, recent scholarship on algorithmic gatekeeping, studies of citizen journalism and Nigerian research on social-media misinformation. The work is thematic discourse in which literature reviewed revolves around themes questions raised to serve as a guide to the discourse.



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Transformation of Gatekeeping: Editorial Control to Distributed and Algorithmic Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is a fundamental concept in communication and media studies that explains how information is selected, filtered, shaped and disseminated before reaching an audience. The concept is traditionally associated with the work of Kurt Lewin, who introduced the idea of the “gate” through which information passes and is either allowed to proceed or stopped (Lewin, 1947). In mass communication, White (1950) subsequently applied the gatekeeping concept to journalism by examining how a newspaper editor, identified as “Mr. Gates,” selected some news items for publication while rejecting others. Traditional gatekeeping therefore located considerable power in the hands of journalists, editors and media institutions. However, the emergence of the Internet, social media, search engines, content-sharing platforms and algorithmic recommendation systems has fundamentally altered the structure of information selection. Gatekeeping has moved from a predominantly centralised editorial process to a more complex system involving journalists, audiences, technology companies, algorithms, influencers, automated systems and networked communities. This transformation is commonly described as a movement from editorial gatekeeping to distributed and algorithmic gatekeeping.

Traditional editorial gatekeeping was largely based on the institutional authority of professional media organisations. Newspapers, radio stations and television organisations possessed limited space or airtime and therefore had to decide which events deserved public attention. Editors and journalists performed this selection through professional judgments concerning newsworthiness, relevance, timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict and human interest. Gatekeeping was consequently an important mechanism through which media organisations constructed the public information environment. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) explain gatekeeping as the process through which information is filtered before it reaches the public, with decisions occurring at different levels within the communication process. In traditional journalism, these decisions were strongly influenced by professional norms, organisational policies, editorial hierarchies and institutional values.

Editorial gatekeeping, however, was never completely neutral or mechanical. Journalists and editors interpreted events and made decisions about what should receive public attention. Their decisions could be influenced by professional routines, organisational interests, political and economic pressures, cultural values and assumptions about audiences. The concept of gatekeeping therefore drew attention to the power of media institutions to influence the visibility of particular issues, people and perspectives. In this system, the audience largely occupied the position of information receiver, while professional communicators controlled the principal channels through which information entered the public sphere. The development of digital communication has significantly weakened this traditional concentration of gatekeeping power. The Internet has reduced many of the technological and economic barriers that previously restricted ordinary individuals from becoming information producers and distributors. Anyone with an Internet connection and an appropriate digital device can now publish text, photographs, audio and video to potentially large audiences. Social networking sites, blogs, video-sharing platforms, podcasts and messaging applications have consequently transformed the audience from a predominantly passive recipient into an active participant in information production and circulation. Bruns (2005) describes this changing environment through the concept of “gatewatching,” in which users monitor and highlight information rather than simply depending on professional media organisations to determine what becomes visible.

The emergence of distributed gatekeeping represents an important stage in this transformation. Rather than information passing through a single editorial gate, digital information may pass through multiple interconnected actors. Journalists, citizen journalists, bloggers, influencers, activists, ordinary social media users, platform moderators, search engines and online communities can all influence the visibility and circulation of information. Gatekeeping is consequently distributed across a network rather than concentrated within one newsroom. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) recognise that gatekeeping occurs at multiple levels, including the individual, routine, organisational, social-institutional and social-system levels. The digital environment has made these multiple levels more visible and interconnected.



Audience participation is particularly important in distributed gatekeeping. Users can share, comment on, repost, like, quote, remix and otherwise modify information produced by professional media organisations or other users. Through these activities, audiences influence which items receive additional attention. An insignificant news item can potentially become highly visible when large numbers of users share it, while an important report may receive limited attention if users do not engage with it. In this sense, audience behaviour itself becomes part of the gatekeeping process. Singer (2014) notes that social media have blurred traditional boundaries between journalists and audiences, producing a more participatory environment in which news production and circulation involve multiple actors.

Social media platforms have therefore created new forms of networked gatekeeping. Barzilai-Nahon (2008) argues that gatekeeping in networked environments should account for the relationships between gatekeepers and the entities whose information is being filtered. Unlike traditional gatekeeping, where a journalist or editor could be clearly identified as the decision-maker, networked environments contain numerous actors with varying degrees of influence. A user's follower network, the activities of other users, platform policies, media organisations and technological systems may all affect whether particular information becomes visible. Gatekeeping has consequently become less predictable and more decentralised. At the same time, digital communication has introduced another powerful form of gatekeeping: algorithmic gatekeeping. Algorithms are sets of computational instructions used to process data and perform tasks. Digital platforms use algorithms to rank, recommend, filter and personalise content. Search engines determine the order in which results are presented; social networking platforms decide which posts appear prominently in users' feeds; video platforms recommend particular videos; and news aggregators select and organise stories according to programmed or machine-learning systems. As a result, information visibility is increasingly influenced by computational processes in addition to human editorial decisions.

Algorithmic gatekeeping differs from traditional editorial gatekeeping because the decision-making process may be partly automated and often operates at a scale that would be impossible for human editors to manage manually. Gillespie (2014) argues that algorithms increasingly play an important role in determining what information users encounter, making them significant actors in the organisation of public knowledge. Algorithms do not simply retrieve information; through ranking and recommendation systems, they influence which information becomes more visible and which information becomes less visible.

The power of algorithms is particularly evident in personalised communication environments. Traditional mass media generally presented relatively similar content to large audiences. Digital platforms, by contrast, can use information about users' previous behaviour, interests, interactions and networks to personalise content. This means that two users searching for information about the same subject may receive different results or recommendations. Information gatekeeping therefore becomes individualised. Rather than one editorial gate determining the information available to everyone, algorithmic systems can create different informational environments for different users. This development has important implications for the concept of the public sphere. Ideally, citizens require access to diverse information in order to participate meaningfully in public discussion. However, personalised algorithmic systems may prioritise content based on predicted user engagement. Pariser (2011) popularised the term “filter bubble” to describe environments in which individuals are increasingly exposed to information selected according to their previous interests and online behaviour. Although subsequent research has shown that the effects of algorithmic personalisation are more complex than a simple filter-bubble explanation suggests, the underlying concern remains important: computational selection can shape the range of information that users encounter.

Algorithmic gatekeeping also raises questions about transparency and accountability. Traditional editorial decisions could, at least theoretically, be attributed to identifiable journalists or editors and evaluated against professional standards. Algorithmic decisions can be more difficult to scrutinise because platforms may not fully disclose the variables, weighting systems or machine-learning processes used to rank content. Diakopoulos (2015) argues that algorithmic accountability requires greater attention to the ways computational systems influence public information. The challenge is particularly significant when algorithmic decisions affect political communication, public health information, journalism or other areas of substantial social importance.



Another significant transformation concerns the relationship between human and machine gatekeepers. Algorithmic gatekeeping has not eliminated human gatekeeping. Instead, the two increasingly operate together. Journalists may select material that algorithms subsequently rank and distribute, while algorithms may identify trends that influence editorial decisions. Platform employees establish content policies and moderation rules, while automated systems apply those rules at enormous scale. Users also interact with these systems through their choices to click, share, comment on and engage with particular content. Modern gatekeeping is therefore best understood as a sociotechnical process involving humans, institutions, audiences and computational systems. The transformation has also changed the speed and scale of information circulation. Traditional editorial gatekeeping involved relatively lengthy production cycles. A newspaper had deadlines, while radio and television broadcasters operated according to scheduled programmes. Digital platforms permit information to circulate almost instantaneously. This speed can facilitate rapid public awareness during emergencies and breaking-news events, but it can also enable inaccurate or unverified information to spread before professional journalists have an opportunity to verify it. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) distinguish different forms of information disorder, including misinformation and disinformation, highlighting the challenges created by the contemporary information environment.

The commercial structure of digital platforms further complicates algorithmic gatekeeping. Many platforms depend heavily on advertising revenue and user engagement. Consequently, the design of recommendation and ranking systems may be influenced by objectives such as retaining users, increasing interaction and delivering targeted advertising. Napoli (2011) argues that changes in media environments require attention to the changing structures through which audiences are measured and valued. In contemporary digital communication, data about users' behaviour have become an important resource, and algorithms are central to transforming that data into predictions and recommendations. Gatekeeping is therefore connected not only to editorial judgment but also to platform economics and data-driven business models.

Despite these transformations, traditional editorial gatekeeping has not disappeared. Professional journalism remains an important source of verification, contextualisation and accountability. Established media organisations continue to determine which stories they investigate, how they frame them and how prominently they publish them. What has changed is the relationship between editorial gatekeeping and other forms of information selection. A professionally produced news story may now be selected by an editor, published on a website, indexed by a search engine, recommended by an algorithm, shared by an influencer, discussed in an online community and subsequently encountered by an audience member through a personalised feed. Each stage can alter the story's visibility and meaning. The contemporary communication environment can therefore be understood as a hybrid gatekeeping system. Human editors, journalists and institutional communicators remain important, but they operate alongside audiences, social networks, platform policies, algorithms and automated recommendation systems. Chadwick (2017) describes contemporary media systems as hybrid because older and newer media logics increasingly interact rather than simply replacing one another. This perspective is useful because it avoids the assumption that digital technologies have completely displaced traditional media. Instead, different forms of gatekeeping coexist and interact.

Sociological Factors Influencing Information Management in the Contemporary Digital Communication Environment

Information management in the contemporary digital communication environment is not merely a technological or administrative process; it is also a social process shaped by the relationships, values, structures and inequalities that characterise society. Information is created, collected, processed, stored, distributed, interpreted and used within particular social contexts. The rapid development of the Internet, social media, mobile communication, artificial intelligence, cloud computing and digital platforms has consequently transformed the ways individuals, organisations and communities produce and manage information. From a sociological perspective, effective information management must therefore take account of the social factors that determine who has access to information, who produces it, whose information is considered credible, how information circulates, and how different groups benefit from digital technologies.

One of the most significant sociological factors influencing information management is social structure and the



organisation of society. Society consists of networks of relationships involving individuals, groups, institutions and organisations. In the contemporary information society, these relationships are increasingly mediated by digital networks. Castells (2000) argues that networks have become a fundamental feature of the social structure of the Information Age because information and communication technologies have strengthened the capacity of networks to operate across geographical and institutional boundaries. This development has important implications for information management because information can now be generated and circulated simultaneously by governments, businesses, media organisations, civil society groups and ordinary citizens. Information managers therefore operate within complex networks in which control over information is increasingly distributed rather than concentrated in a single institution. The effectiveness of information management consequently depends on the ability to identify relevant actors, understand their relationships and coordinate information flows among them.

Another important factor is social class and socioeconomic inequality. Access to digital technologies and the ability to use them effectively are strongly influenced by income, occupation, education and other socioeconomic resources. Individuals and organisations with greater financial resources are generally better positioned to acquire sophisticated devices, reliable Internet connections, information-management systems and specialised digital skills. Those with fewer resources may experience difficulties accessing, processing and using digital information. Van Dijk (2006) demonstrates that the digital divide is not limited to whether people possess computers or Internet connections. It also involves differences in skills and patterns of usage. Thus, even where physical access to digital technologies has expanded, inequalities may persist in people's ability to obtain meaningful benefits from those technologies. Information management in contemporary society must therefore recognise that equal availability of digital information does not necessarily produce equal access to, understanding of or benefits from that information.

Education and digital literacy constitute another major sociological influence. Information management requires more than the ability to operate a smartphone or computer. Individuals need the capacity to search for information, evaluate sources, distinguish reliable information from misinformation, organise information and apply it appropriately. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2011) found that Internet skills vary considerably among social groups and that education is an important contributor to different forms of Internet competence. Similarly, Scheerder, van Deursen, and van Dijk (2017) observe that socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics are important determinants of digital skills, usage and outcomes. Consequently, organisations that manage information effectively must consider the educational backgrounds and digital competencies of their employees and audiences. Digital literacy programmes, continuous professional development and information-literacy training are therefore increasingly important components of contemporary information management.

Culture and social values also influence how information is created, interpreted, shared and managed. Every society possesses cultural norms concerning privacy, authority, communication, knowledge, trust and acceptable behaviour. These cultural orientations influence people's attitudes towards digital communication. For example, some communities may place considerable emphasis on collective ownership and sharing of information, while others may place greater emphasis on individual privacy and control over personal data. Cultural values may also influence how people determine what constitutes credible information and whom they regard as an authoritative source. Consequently, information managers working across cultural boundaries must recognise differences in language, values, communication practices and social expectations. Failure to understand these differences may lead to misunderstanding, resistance, ineffective communication or inappropriate information-management practices.

Age and generational differences are also sociologically significant. Different generations may have different levels of exposure to digital technologies, different communication habits and different attitudes towards online information. Younger people who have grown up with digital media may be more familiar with social networking, mobile applications and multimedia communication, whereas some older users may have acquired digital competencies later in life. However, age should not be treated as a simple predictor of digital competence because educational background, occupation, motivation and social support also influence digital skills. Van Dijk (2006) consequently emphasises that digital inequality involves several dimensions, including



motivational, physical, skills and usage access. Effective information management therefore requires organisations to consider the diverse digital experiences of their audiences rather than assuming that all users possess identical competencies.

Gender and other dimensions of social inequality also influence participation in the digital information environment. Access to technology, digital education, occupational opportunities and participation in online spaces may differ among social groups. Such differences can affect who produces information, whose voices are represented and who benefits from digital communication. Contemporary information management should therefore pay attention to inclusiveness and representation. If information systems are designed around the experiences of only one social group, they may reproduce existing inequalities rather than reduce them. Sociological analysis is useful here because it draws attention to the relationship between information practices and broader structures of social opportunity.

Another important factor is social power and authority. Information is closely connected to power because the ability to determine what information is produced, preserved, distributed and recognised as legitimate can influence public understanding and institutional decision-making. In digital environments, power is exercised not only by traditional institutions such as governments, universities and established media organisations but also by technology companies, digital platforms, influencers, online communities and networked individuals. Castells (2000) explains that power relationships remain central to network society, even though the structures through which power operates are changing. Information managers must consequently understand who controls information resources, who has the authority to disseminate information and how competing actors attempt to shape public knowledge.

Social networks and interpersonal relationships further affect information management. People rarely receive information exclusively from formal institutional sources. They obtain information through family members, friends, professional networks, online communities, social media contacts and other interpersonal relationships. Information can therefore acquire credibility because it is communicated by someone whom the recipient trusts. At the same time, social networks can facilitate the rapid circulation of inaccurate or misleading information. The networked nature of contemporary communication means that information managers must monitor not only formal channels but also informal conversations and user-generated content. The challenge is to understand how information travels through social relationships and how trust is constructed within those networks.

Privacy, social norms and ethical expectations constitute another significant sociological factor. Digital communication generates enormous quantities of personal and organisational data, creating opportunities for more sophisticated information management but also raising concerns about surveillance, data misuse, identity protection and individual autonomy. People's willingness to provide personal information is influenced by their cultural values, previous experiences, institutional trust and perceptions of risk. Organisations that disregard these social expectations may lose the confidence of their stakeholders. Responsible information management therefore requires not only technological security but also respect for privacy, transparency, informed consent and ethical standards.

Social change and technological adaptation influence information management because digital communication environments are continually evolving. New technologies change patterns of interaction, organisational structures and expectations concerning the speed and accessibility of information. The emergence of networked communication has made information more immediate, interactive and participatory, while simultaneously increasing the volume and complexity of information that individuals and organisations must manage. The contemporary information manager must therefore understand information management as a dynamic social process rather than a fixed technical activity.

Implications of Contemporary Gatekeeping for Information Management Practices

Contemporary gatekeeping has significantly transformed the way information is created, selected, organised, distributed and consumed. Traditionally, gatekeeping was primarily associated with professional journalists



and editors who determined which events and information would gain access to the mass media. In the contemporary digital communication environment, however, gatekeeping is no longer concentrated within news organisations. It is increasingly distributed among journalists, audiences, social media users, digital platforms, algorithms, search engines, influencers and other technological and institutional actors. Wallace (2018) observes that contemporary digital gatekeeping involves the interaction of individuals, algorithms and platforms in determining how information gains visibility. Similarly, Karlsson et al. (2022) identify publishing by news organisations, sharing by social actors and algorithmic spreading by platforms as interconnected gatekeeping logics. This transformation has profound implications for information management, particularly in relation to credibility, accessibility, participation and accountability.

One of the implications of contemporary gatekeeping concerns the credibility of information. In traditional media systems, editorial gatekeeping provided an institutional mechanism through which information could be checked, verified and subjected to professional standards before publication. Journalists and editors were expected to evaluate sources, verify facts and observe professional codes of ethics. Although traditional editorial systems were not free from errors, bias or institutional pressures, the identification of responsible journalists and media organisations provided a relatively clear basis for assigning responsibility for published information. Contemporary digital gatekeeping complicates this arrangement because information can be produced and distributed by numerous actors whose professional qualifications and motivations may be difficult to establish.

The participation of algorithms in information selection creates an additional credibility challenge. Algorithms are not necessarily designed to determine whether information is true or professionally verified. They may instead rank or recommend information according to variables such as relevance, previous user behaviour, popularity or predicted engagement. Recent scholarship indicates that algorithmic systems can influence news visibility and may encourage publishers to pay greater attention to engagement metrics and shareability (Dvir-Gvirsman & Ivan, 2026). Consequently, information that generates strong emotional reactions may receive considerable visibility even when its informational value or credibility is questionable. The problem is not that algorithms inherently produce false information, but that the criteria used to determine visibility may differ from the criteria traditionally associated with journalistic verification.

At the same time, contemporary gatekeeping does not necessarily destroy credibility. Digital environments can also create new opportunities for verification. Audiences can compare different sources, consult primary documents, access fact-checking organisations and examine competing accounts of an event. The multiplicity of information sources can therefore strengthen critical evaluation when users possess adequate information and digital literacy. Research by Scheffauer et al. (2024), for example, found that professional journalistic gatekeeping remains important to perceptions of news trust, even within social media environments where algorithms also function as gatekeepers. This suggests that professional editorial judgment continues to have value despite the increasing influence of computational systems. Effective information management therefore requires a combination of technological distribution and credible human verification.

Contemporary gatekeeping also has significant implications for information accessibility. Digital technologies have greatly reduced some of the traditional barriers to information production and distribution. An individual no longer needs access to a printing press, broadcasting licence or established media organisation to publish information to a potentially global audience. Social media platforms, websites, blogs and other digital channels have expanded opportunities for individuals and marginalised groups to make their experiences and perspectives visible. This represents an important democratisation of information because voices that might previously have been excluded by conventional editorial structures can potentially reach large audiences.

However, greater technical accessibility does not necessarily mean equal access to information. Algorithmic systems can determine which content users encounter and which content remains relatively invisible. Search rankings, recommendation systems and personalised news feeds may give greater prominence to some information while reducing the visibility of other material. Karlsson et al. (2022) demonstrate that platform algorithms can influence the composition of the news that users encounter, meaning that publication alone does not guarantee visibility. Consequently, contemporary information management must distinguish between



the availability of information and its discoverability. Information may technically exist online but remain inaccessible in practical terms if it is difficult for users to locate, understand or encounter.

Digital inequalities further complicate accessibility. Access to reliable Internet services, appropriate devices, digital skills and affordable data remains uneven across societies. Differences in education, income, geography and technological competence can affect the ability of individuals to participate effectively in digital information environments. Thus, information managers must consider not only how information is distributed but also whether different categories of users have the practical capacity to access and use it. Accessibility in contemporary information management should therefore encompass technological access, linguistic accessibility, digital literacy, disability inclusion and the ability to navigate complex digital environments.

Another major implication concerns public participation. Contemporary gatekeeping has transformed audiences from predominantly passive recipients of information into active participants in information production and circulation. Users can comment on news stories, share reports, upload photographs and videos, create independent content, challenge professional journalists and introduce alternative perspectives into public discussions. Bruns (2005) conceptualises this development in terms of gatewatching, whereby users monitor and circulate information rather than relying exclusively on professional media organisations to determine what deserves attention. Participation can therefore broaden the range of voices involved in public communication. This participatory dimension can improve information management by providing organisations with immediate feedback from their audiences. Comments, reactions, discussions, shares and other forms of audience engagement can provide information managers and journalists with indications of public concerns and information needs. Audience analytics can similarly influence editorial decisions. Zamith et al. (2021) describe forms of participative gatekeeping in which audience data influence promotional decisions, longer-term coverage strategies and experimentation within news organisations. Consequently, audiences are not simply consumers of information; their behaviour can become an input into subsequent information selection and management.

Nevertheless, increased participation can also create difficulties. Popularity does not necessarily correspond to accuracy, relevance or public value. A large number of shares or comments may indicate strong emotional engagement rather than the quality of information. When organisations rely excessively on audience metrics, they may give greater attention to content that generates immediate engagement while neglecting complex issues that require sustained investigation. Recent research on platformised journalism similarly indicates that engagement-oriented systems can influence editorial priorities and encourage attention to content that performs well under platform metrics (Dvir-Gvirsman & Ivan, 2026). Information managers therefore need to distinguish between audience engagement as useful feedback and audience popularity as a measure of informational value.

Contemporary gatekeeping also has implications for accountability. In traditional media, responsibility for published information could relatively easily be traced to journalists, editors and identifiable media organisations. Digital communication introduces a more complex chain of responsibility. A piece of information may originate with an individual, be republished by a news organisation, shared by hundreds of users, ranked by an algorithm and recommended by a platform. Determining responsibility for the ultimate visibility and consequences of the information can therefore become difficult. Wallace (2018) argues that digital gatekeeping involves multiple gatekeeper types operating through platforms and decentralised mechanisms, making information control substantially more complex than in traditional media.

Algorithmic gatekeeping particularly raises questions about transparency and accountability. When a platform recommends one item rather than another, users may not know precisely why the decision was made. The criteria used by recommendation systems can involve complex computational processes, user data and commercial objectives. Diakopoulos (2015) argues for algorithmic accountability because computational systems increasingly influence important decisions and information flows. Accountability in the digital environment therefore requires attention not only to what information is published but also to the technological processes through which information is ranked, recommended, amplified or suppressed. For information management, this means that accountability must extend beyond individual communicators to include



organisations and technological systems. News organisations remain responsible for the accuracy and ethical quality of the material they publish, even when distribution increasingly occurs through third-party platforms. Platforms, meanwhile, face questions about their content moderation policies, recommendation systems and transparency practices. The introduction of artificial intelligence into information production further complicates this issue because AI systems can participate in research, writing, editing, translation, summarisation and content recommendation. Simon (2025) reports that AI is increasingly being incorporated across different stages of the news-production and distribution process, thereby reshaping the gatekeeping activities of news organisations. The more extensively automated systems participate in information management, the more important it becomes to establish clear human oversight and responsibility.

The transformation of gatekeeping therefore requires information managers to adopt more comprehensive verification, transparency and monitoring practices. Credibility can no longer be protected simply by checking information before publication. Organisations must also monitor how information is subsequently modified, shared, interpreted and amplified across digital networks. They need mechanisms for correcting errors, identifying manipulated information, explaining editorial and technological decisions, protecting personal data and responding to audience concerns. Transparency becomes particularly important where algorithms influence information visibility because users need to understand, at least in general terms, why particular information is being recommended to them.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The first major finding is that digitalisation has not abolished gatekeeping. Instead, it has transformed and redistributed it. Traditional media organisations remain important gatekeepers, but they now operate alongside social-media users, influencers, platform companies, algorithms, search engines and fact-checking organisations. The evidence from recent scholarship demonstrates a movement from centralised gatekeeping toward a more distributed and networked arrangement.

This finding directly addresses the first objective of the study. The traditional gatekeeper has been supplemented by multiple new gatekeepers. The consequence is not the disappearance of information control but the multiplication of sites at which information can be filtered. Digital gatekeeping is therefore better understood as a network rather than a single gate.

The study also found out that algorithmic systems now play a substantial role in determining information visibility. Unlike traditional editors, algorithms do not necessarily make decisions based on explicit professional news values. They may operate through computational models that use behavioural data and platform-specific criteria to determine which information users encounter.

The systematic review of algorithmic influence on media legitimacy identifies algorithmic curation and metric-based decision-making as important components of contemporary gatekeeping. This development creates a significant sociological issue because algorithmic decisions can influence collective attention without always being visible to users. The gatekeeping process becomes partly embedded in technical infrastructures.

Finding is that information management cannot be adequately understood as a purely technical process. The evidence demonstrates that information management is influenced by professional norms, organisational objectives, economic incentives, cultural values, technological structures and user behaviour.

The sociological character of information management is particularly evident in algorithmic environments. Rilinger's (2024) work demonstrates how algorithmic systems can structure social action and relationships within digital markets. Thus, information systems should be understood as social systems as much as technological systems.

The study found out that is that participatory communication has simultaneously expanded information diversity and increased information risks. Citizens can now provide alternative perspectives and document events ignored by mainstream media. This represents an important democratic opportunity. However, the same systems allow inaccurate information to circulate rapidly. The Nigerian study on social-media knowledge



demonstrates the relevance of user behaviour to false-news sharing. The implication is that greater participation does not automatically produce better information. Participation must be accompanied by verification and information literacy.

In the digital environment, credibility depends on the interaction of publishers, users, platforms, journalists, fact-checkers and information systems. The 2025 Reuters Institute report shows that audiences continue to value accuracy, transparency and trusted sources even as news consumption becomes increasingly fragmented. This means that information credibility must be constructed collectively. Platforms must improve transparency; journalists must maintain verification standards; users must develop critical information skills; and organisations must establish clear information-management policies.

Another major finding is that transparency is essential to contemporary gatekeeping. Users need to understand, as far as practicable, why information is recommended, removed, restricted or prioritised. Platforms require mechanisms through which decisions can be examined and challenged. UNESCO's guidelines specifically call for transparency, accountability, human-rights due diligence and accessible information in platform governance. The finding suggests that the future of information management should not depend solely on technological efficiency. It must also incorporate ethical and social accountability.

CONCLUSION

Gatekeeping and the sociology of information management have undergone profound transformation in the digital age. While digital technologies have democratized information production and expanded global communication, they have also created new forms of informational power, surveillance, algorithmic control, and digital inequality.

Traditional gatekeepers such as editors and journalists no longer monopolize information dissemination. Instead, digital platforms, algorithms, artificial intelligence systems, and online communities increasingly shape contemporary information environments.

The sociology of information management reveals that information is not merely a technological resource but also a social and political instrument shaped by power relations, institutional structures, and technological systems. Contemporary digital societies therefore face the challenge of balancing informational openness with ethical regulation, democratic participation, and social responsibility.

The future of gatekeeping will likely involve continuous interaction between human agency, technological systems, institutional governance, and participatory digital cultures. Ensuring ethical, transparent, and inclusive information management remains essential for sustaining democratic societies in the digital age.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended as follows:

1. Platform should be always be moderated by their regulators or organizational heads to checkmate excesses.
2. Stronger institutional mechanisms for transparency, ethical digital information management and continuous professional development for information and media practitioners.

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