



THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL ALGORITHM AS A SOCIAL JUDGEMENT IN YOMI ADEGOKE'S *THE LIST*

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of social algorithms as a form of social judgment in Yomi Adegoke's *The List*. Using a qualitative method, it applies Wellek and Warren's sociology of literature and Ng's concept of social algorithms. The analysis focuses on anonymous lists, viral content, and the rapid formation of public opinion. The findings show that algorithms amplify accusations through likes, comments, reposts, and shares, causing reputational damage, emotional distress, career uncertainty, and relationship problems for the characters. In conclusion, the novel reflects how digital platforms spread information quickly and encourage judgment before full verified.

Keywords: social algorithms, social judgment, anonymous lists, viral content, digital society

1. Introduction

Social media has become an important platform for communication, information sharing, and opinion expression in Indonesia. According to the Digital 2025 Global Overview Report, Indonesia has around 143 million active social media users, demonstrating the significant influence of digital platforms on communication and social interaction. This influence is supported by social algorithms that organize, filter, and prioritize content based on user interactions, popularity, and relevance (Dijk et al., 2020). As explained by Ng (2022), social algorithms shape information visibility, public discourse, and social judgment, making them important in influencing communication patterns and public perception in digital spaces.

The impact of social algorithms is evident in cases involving public figures, such as Gofar Hilman, whose reputation was damaged after sexual harassment allegations went viral on Twitter in 2021 despite later being clarified as inaccurate. This case illustrates how social media accelerates public judgment and affects individuals' reputations and careers. Fadhillah (2024) explains that this phenomenon is closely related to cancel culture, while Syahiban et al. (2025) argue that social media functions as a virtual public sphere where people

express criticism and moral judgment. O'Keefe (2009) also states that social judgment is influenced by attitudes and social values, making digital platforms important spaces for the formation of collective opinions.

These issues are reflected in *The List* (2023) by Yomi Adegoke, who was inspired by anonymous online lists during the #MeToo movement. The novel follows Ola Olajide and Michael Obiajulu after Michael is accused of sexual misconduct through a viral anonymous list. As the allegations spread online, public opinion, social media algorithms, and digital discussions place intense pressure on their relationship and Michael's reputation. Rather than confirming the truth of the accusations, the novel highlights how online information and public judgment shape trust, reputation, and personal life.

Based on previous studies, no research has specifically examined *The List* as the object of analysis. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between social algorithms and social judgment represented in the novel. Theoretically, it expands understanding of algorithms as mechanisms of social judgment; academically, it contributes to literary studies by connecting literature with digital issues; and practically, it helps readers, content creators, and media



practitioners better understand the influence of social algorithms and use digital platforms more responsibly.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Algorithm

Social refers to interactions between individuals that shape behaviour through shared norms, values, and social structures (Durkheim, 1893). These interactions help maintain order, cooperation, and stability in society. Meanwhile, an algorithm is a step-by-step procedure used to solve problems or achieve specific goals and is widely applied in digital systems, including search engines and social media platforms (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). When combined, social algorithms describe how platform algorithms and user interactions work together to organize, filter, and prioritize information. According to Ng (2022), social algorithms influence communication patterns, public discourse, and social perception by determining which content receives greater visibility and engagement. As a result, information can spread rapidly, become viral, and shape collective public opinion, often leading to social judgment before information is fully verified.

One ways social algorithms operate is through the distribution of anonymous lists. Social media enables users to anonymously share accusations, lists of names, or controversial information, allowing such content to circulate without strong verification. Ng (2020) explains that social judgment often occurs when users collectively criticize, condemn, or withdraw support from individuals believed to have violated social norms. Anonymity therefore facilitates the rapid spread of accusations and encourages collective judgment in digital spaces. Another way is through viral content, where posts receiving high engagement are amplified by platform algorithms and reach wider audiences. Ng (2020) states that user participation through sharing, commenting, and reposting accelerates the circulation of information, while Gillespie (2014) argues that algorithms prioritize highly engaged content, increasing public attention and

scrutiny. Finally, social algorithms contribute to quickly forming public opinion, as viral information encourages users to respond through comments, criticism, or support. Ng (2020) and Thorson and Wells (2016) emphasize that repeated algorithmic exposure strengthens collective opinions and accelerates social judgment in digital spaces.

2.2 Social Judgment

Judgment is the process of evaluating a person, action, or situation based on available information, values, and social norms (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Social judgment develops when these evaluations are formed collectively through interactions within society. In digital media, users easily express comments, criticism, and support, gradually creating public opinions that influence how individuals are perceived. Ng (2020) explains that social judgment is the collective evaluation of individuals based on perceived violations of social norms, while Hovland (1961) argues that communication, message content, source credibility, and context strongly influence how people evaluate information. Consequently, social media not only distributes information but also constructs public opinion, strengthening and accelerating social judgment that can significantly affect an individual's reputation and social life.

2.3 Sociology of Literature

This study applies the sociology of literature because it examines the relationship between literary works and social reality. Literature reflects social conditions, including how digital culture, social media, and public opinion influence people's lives. Therefore, *The List* is analyzed not only as fiction but also as a representation of social algorithms and social judgment in contemporary society. Wellek and Warren (1949) explain that literature can be studied through the author's background, the social content of the work, and readers' responses, showing that literary narratives are closely connected to real social conditions. Swingewood (1972) further



argues that literature not only reflects reality but also critiques social conditions and power relations. In this study, power is represented through social media users and algorithms that shape narratives, spread information, and influence public judgment. The circulation of allegations and controversial information creates social pressure, affects public opinion, and places individuals in vulnerable positions. Through this perspective, literary works reveal that personal conflicts are closely connected to broader social issues, including digital culture, public opinion, and cancel culture.

Furthermore, the sociology of literature helps explain how literary works influence readers' understanding of social issues. By presenting the consequences of social judgment and cancel culture, literature encourages readers to reflect on how digital society treats individuals. Thus, literary narratives function not only as stories but also as a medium for questioning and criticizing contemporary social realities that are closely connected to everyday life.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method because it focuses on exploring the meanings individuals or groups attribute to social phenomena through interpretation and theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research collects data within participants' contexts and analyses them inductively and deductively to identify themes while incorporating participants' voices, researcher reflexivity, and interpretations. This study specifically applies a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which emphasizes interpreting lived experiences through texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is appropriate because the data from *The List* are interpreted using relevant theories and concepts to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings and themes represented in the novel. The data consist of sentences, paragraphs, dialogues, narrations, and quotations taken from the first edition of *The List* by Yomi Adegoke (Fourth Estate, 2023), while secondary data

are collected from books, journals, and websites.

The data collection process consists of four steps. First, the novel is read comprehensively several times to obtain a thorough understanding of the story. Second, relevant sentences, paragraphs, dialogues, narrations, and quotations are marked during the reading process. Third, the researcher studies the concepts and theories applied in the research to determine the relevance of the collected data. Finally, irrelevant data are removed, and only the most relevant data are selected and organized for further analysis.

The data are analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involves selecting, simplifying, organizing, and focusing on relevant data to facilitate analysis. After the data are displayed, conclusions are drawn by interpreting the findings and explaining their relationship to the research topic. Finally, the conclusions are verified to ensure that they are accurate, consistent, and fully supported by the analysed data.

4. Result and Discussion

This chapter presents the research findings and analysis based on *The List* by Yomi Adegoke. The novel tells the story of Ola and Michael, whose relationship is disrupted after Michael's name appears on an anonymous online list accusing him of sexual misconduct. *The list* spreads rapidly through social media, generates widespread public reactions, and forms social judgment before the accusations are verified. This study analyses the influence of social algorithms through three aspects: distributing anonymous lists, viral content, and quickly forming public opinion. These findings are also interpreted using Wellek and Warren's (1949) sociology of literature, which views literature as a reflection of social reality in the digital era.

4.1 Distributing Anonymous Lists

Michael is portrayed as a successful media professional whose reputation is



initially strengthened by social media through his popular podcast. However, the same digital system later destroys his reputation when his name appears on an anonymous Twitter account called @_the_list. The account publishes a spreadsheet containing names and accusations while remaining anonymous, encouraging users to immediately access and share the content. According to Ng (2022), social judgment develops through the interaction between user engagement and social media algorithms that increase the visibility of highly discussed information. The anonymous list spreads rapidly through links, retweets, likes, hashtags, and comments, making Michael's name widely known before any verification takes place. Social media users immediately associate him with serious crimes, while the algorithm continuously amplifies the content because of increasing public engagement. As explained by Kietzmann et al. (2011), interactions such as likes, comments, and shares expand the circulation of information. The novel therefore reflects contemporary digital society, where information is often accepted and distributed faster than factual verification, supporting Wellek and Warren's view that literature represents social reality.

Public emotions such as shock, anger, disappointment, and suspicion quickly develop into collective judgment. Users not only criticize Michael but also attack Ola because of her relationship with him and even demand that Michael lose his job. As more users express similar opinions, individual reactions develop into collective social pressure, influencing both Michael's reputation and Ola's trust in him. This situation illustrates Ng's (2022) argument that emotional reactions and algorithmic visibility accelerate the formation of social judgment in digital spaces.

4.2 Viral Content

The anonymous list becomes viral because social media algorithms continuously promote content receiving high engagement. Michael and Ola's names

spread across multiple platforms through reposts, hashtags, comments, and online discussions, attracting thousands of new followers and widespread public attention. Ironically, Ola had previously benefited from the same algorithmic system through her viral article #MCsToo, but she later experiences its negative effects when Michael becomes the target of viral accusations. The novel shows that algorithms not only increase popularity but also rapidly spread unverified information that shapes public perception and damages personal reputations.

As the issue spreads, online users increasingly attack both Michael and Ola with accusations and negative comments unsupported by verified evidence. Michael experiences frustration, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion as he struggles to identify the person responsible for placing his name on the list. Through these events, the novel demonstrates how viral information, strengthened by algorithmic visibility, intensifies public scrutiny and creates psychological pressure. This portrayal supports Ng's (2022) concept of social algorithms and Wellek and Warren's (1949) view that literature reflects real social conditions.

4.3 Quickly Forming Opinions

Social media enables users to form opinions rapidly because information, comments, likes, retweets, and hashtags spread instantly across digital platforms. Although Ola and Michael attempt to seek facts rather than immediately accept public opinion, they struggle against a dominant online narrative that has already been strengthened by algorithmic circulation. From the first appearance of the anonymous account to the increasing interactions surrounding the post, users quickly develop negative impressions of Michael before any clarification is available.

As public reactions continue to grow, emotional responses gradually become collective judgment. Repeated exposure to comments, hashtags, and interactions encourages users to accept dominant



opinions as truth, while every like and retweet becomes, in Michael's perspective, a form of public conviction. Consequently, social media algorithms not only distribute information but also strengthen collective judgment, illustrating how reputation can be damaged through digital engagement rather than verified evidence. This finding reflects both Ng's theory of social algorithms and Wellek and Warren's concept of literature as a representation of contemporary social reality.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that social algorithms significantly influence the construction of social judgment in Yomi Adegoke's *The List*. Based on Ng's (2022) concept, algorithmic systems and user interactions work together to distribute, amplify, and circulate information on digital platforms. The process begins with the distribution of an anonymous list, which spreads unverified accusations that become viral through likes, comments, reposts, and hashtags. As a result, users quickly form collective judgments before the truth is verified, causing reputational damage, emotional distress, professional insecurity, and strained personal relationships. These findings show that social algorithms function not only as technological systems but also as social forces that shape public perception and judgment. They also support Wellek and Warren's (1949) sociology of literature, which views literature as a reflection of social reality, especially in contemporary digital society where social media algorithms strongly influence public opinion and social judgment.

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