

From cultural democratisation to platform-mediated cultural stratification, explaining the transformation of cultural consumption in France and Poland

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Abstract

Digital platformisation has fundamentally transformed the ways in which culture is produced, circulated and consumed. While digital technologies have significantly expanded opportunities for cultural participation, it remains unclear whether greater accessibility has translated into more equitable forms of cultural democracy or instead generated new mechanisms of cultural inequality. Existing research has extensively examined platform economies, cultural participation and digital transformation, yet these strands of scholarship have rarely been integrated within a comparative framework capable of explaining how platformisation reshapes cultural consumption across different institutional contexts. This article develops an interdisciplinary framework that combines insights from cultural sociology, cultural economics and communication studies to examine the socio-economic transformation of cultural consumption in France and Poland. Adopting a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), the study draws upon comparative institutional analysis, secondary statistical evidence, European policy documents and qualitative materials derived from research on the transformation of aesthetic standards in digital environments. The article introduces the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Model, which conceptualises platformisation as

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a sequential process through which expanding digital accessibility is progressively transformed into algorithmically mediated visibility, differentiated opportunities for symbolic recognition and new forms of socio-economic inequality. The comparative findings indicate that, despite substantial differences in national traditions of cultural governance, platformisation produces increasingly convergent mechanisms of cultural consumption by reorganising visibility through algorithmic recommendation systems and attention-based market dynamics. The article argues that the principal challenge for contemporary cultural democracy no longer concerns access to cultural production itself but the unequal distribution of visibility and symbolic recognition within platform-governed digital environments. By integrating debates on platformisation, cultural consumption and social stratification, the proposed PMCS Model offers a new theoretical framework for analysing cultural inequalities in the digital age.

Keywords: platformisation; cultural consumption; cultural stratification; cultural democracy; algorithmic governance; attention economy; digital cultural participation; comparative cultural sociology

JEL Classification: Z11, Z13, Z18, L82, L86, O33

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has fundamentally transformed the institutional conditions under which culture is produced, circulated and consumed. Whereas cultural participation was historically mediated by cultural institutions, professional gatekeepers and established creative industries, contemporary cultural practices are increasingly organised through platform infrastructures that govern visibility, recommendation and audience formation by means of algorithmic systems (van Dijck et al., 2018; Gillespie, 2018; Poell et al., 2022). Digital platforms no longer function merely as technological intermediaries facilitating access to cultural content. Rather, they actively shape the conditions under which cultural value is produced, recognised and exchanged, redefining the mechanisms through which symbolic recognition, cultural legitimacy and economic opportunities are distributed within contemporary societies (Bourdieu, 1984; Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Lamont, 2012).

These transformations have reinvigorated long-standing debates concerning cultural democracy and social inequality. Early accounts of digitalisation frequently

suggested that technological innovation would democratise cultural participation by lowering barriers to production, reducing dependence on traditional cultural intermediaries and enabling broader public engagement in creative activities (Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008). Indeed, digital platforms have substantially expanded opportunities for participation by allowing unprecedented numbers of individuals to create, distribute and consume cultural content. However, growing accessibility has not necessarily translated into more egalitarian patterns of cultural participation. Instead, digital platformisation has generated new mechanisms through which algorithmic recommendation systems, attention-based competition and data-driven governance selectively allocate visibility, symbolic recognition and economic value, thereby reshaping existing forms of cultural inequality rather than eliminating them (Beer, 2017; Gillespie, 2018; Poell et al., 2022).

This paradox exposes an important limitation within contemporary scholarship, research in cultural economics has extensively analysed the digital transformation of creative industries, changing models of cultural production and evolving patterns of cultural consumption (Caves, 2000; Towse, 2019). Economic sociology has demonstrated how cultural capital, symbolic value and social inequalities continue to shape participation in cultural life (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 2012). At the same time, platform studies have provided substantial evidence that algorithmic governance, datafication and digital infrastructures increasingly organise markets, social interaction and cultural exchange (van Dijck et al., 2018; Gillespie, 2018; Poell et al., 2022). Despite these important advances, relatively little research has systematically integrated these perspectives into a common analytical framework capable of explaining how platformisation simultaneously restructures cultural accessibility, algorithmic visibility, symbolic recognition and socio-economic differentiation. Existing studies have predominantly examined these processes independently, leaving unresolved the broader question of how digital platforms reorganise the mechanisms through which cultural inequalities are produced and reproduced across different institutional contexts.

This article addresses that research gap by proposing an interdisciplinary framework integrating cultural sociology, cultural economics and communication studies. Rather than conceptualising platformisation exclusively as a technological or economic process, the article approaches it as a broader institutional transformation that reconfigures the production, circulation and recognition of cultural value within digitally mediated environments. Particular attention is devoted to the relationships between algorithmic governance, the allocation of attention, symbolic recognition and the distribution of cultural and economic resources. By shifting analytical attention from

questions of technological access towards mechanisms of visibility and recognition, the article contributes to ongoing debates concerning the transformation of cultural democracy under conditions of platform capitalism (Srniczek, 2017; Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

The empirical analysis focuses on France and Poland as two institutionally distinct yet regulatorily comparable cases embedded within the common legal framework of the European Union. The comparative design is methodologically motivated by the logic of a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), which seeks to identify common mechanisms operating across substantially different institutional environments (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). France represents a mature cultural economy characterised by a long tradition of public cultural policy, strong institutional support for cultural production and highly developed creative industries. Poland, by contrast, reflects the trajectory of a post-socialist cultural system shaped by rapid economic transformation, institutional restructuring and accelerated digital adaptation following European integration. Despite these historical and institutional differences, both countries operate within the same European regulatory architecture governing digital markets, copyright, artificial intelligence and platform governance, including the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act and the evolving European framework for trustworthy artificial intelligence (European Commission, 2022, 2024). This combination of institutional divergence and regulatory convergence provides an analytically valuable setting for examining whether platformisation generates comparable mechanisms of cultural stratification despite differing national traditions of cultural governance.

The principal theoretical contribution of the article is the introduction of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework, which conceptualises platformisation as a sequential socio-institutional process linking expanding cultural accessibility with algorithmically mediated visibility, symbolic recognition and the redistribution of cultural and economic value. Rather than interpreting digital participation as an inherently democratising process, the PMCS Framework demonstrates how algorithmic infrastructures progressively reorganise the mechanisms through which cultural opportunities, legitimacy and recognition are allocated within digital environments. In doing so, the framework extends existing theories of cultural stratification by incorporating the institutional role of platforms as active intermediaries shaping the production and reproduction of cultural inequalities.

The article argues that the central challenge facing contemporary cultural democracy no longer concerns access to cultural production alone. Instead, inequalities increasingly emerge through the algorithmic organisation of visibility, recognition and participation within platform-mediated cultural environments. Consequently,

understanding contemporary cultural consumption requires analytical frameworks capable of integrating technological infrastructures, institutional arrangements and socio-cultural mechanisms within a unified explanatory perspective. By combining comparative institutional analysis with qualitative evidence and secondary statistical data, this study contributes to the sociology of culture by demonstrating that platformisation transforms not only patterns of cultural participation but also the institutional mechanisms through which cultural value, symbolic recognition and socio-economic differentiation are produced in the digital age.

2. Theoretical foundations of platform-mediated cultural stratification

2.1. Cultural democracy in the age of platformisation

The distinction between cultural democratisation and cultural democracy has long structured debates in cultural policy, cultural sociology and cultural economics. Although both paradigms seek to broaden participation in cultural life, they rest on different normative assumptions concerning cultural value, institutional authority and the relationship between cultural producers and audiences. Cultural democratisation is primarily concerned with widening access to established and institutionally legitimised forms of culture, whereas cultural democracy emphasises plurality, participation and the legitimacy of diverse cultural expressions. This distinction remains analytically important, yet neither paradigm was developed to explain cultural participation in environments increasingly organised by digital platforms, algorithmic recommendation systems and data-driven infrastructures.

The paradigm of cultural democratisation emerged within post-war European cultural policy and was particularly influential in France from the 1960s onwards. It was based on the assumption that cultural inequality resulted primarily from unequal access to recognised cultural institutions, artistic production and educational resources and public intervention was therefore expected to reduce financial, geographical and social barriers to participation by extending access to museums, theatres, libraries and other institutions of legitimate culture. Within this framework, cultural inclusion was largely understood as the broader dissemination of existing cultural goods and established aesthetic forms (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Dubois, 2011).

The democratisation paradigm nevertheless reproduced a hierarchical conception of cultural value. It generally assumed that public institutions and cultural professionals retained the authority to determine which cultural forms merited dissemination and public support. Access was broadened, but the cultural canon itself was rarely subjected to fundamental reconsideration. The model therefore addressed the unequal distribution of cultural opportunities more directly than the unequal social capacity to appropriate, interpret and legitimise cultural forms. Cultural democracy emerged partly as a critique of this top-down approach. Rather than defining participation as access to a pre-existing cultural canon, it recognises individuals and communities as active producers, interpreters and circulators of culture. It challenges rigid distinctions between legitimate, popular and everyday cultural practices and emphasises cultural rights, diversity, co-creation and participation in symbolic life. International and European frameworks concerning cultural diversity have reinforced this shift by broadening the understanding of cultural participation beyond institutional attendance towards expression, identity, community practice and cultural agency (Council of Europe, 2005; UNESCO, 2005).

The transition from cultural democratisation to cultural democracy represented an important normative development. However, both paradigms were formulated primarily in relation to public institutions, cultural organisations, education systems and national cultural policies. Their central analytical categories remain access, representation, participation and institutional inclusion. They devote considerably less attention to privately governed digital infrastructures that now organise a substantial proportion of cultural exposure, circulation and recognition. This limitation becomes especially important when cultural participation is considered through the sociology of stratification. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital demonstrated that access to cultural goods does not automatically produce equal participation because cultural practices are embedded in unequal distributions of education, social position and socially acquired competences (Bourdieu, 1984). Formal access to museums, literature or artistic production does not provide individuals with equivalent capacities to decode, appropriate or convert cultural experiences into symbolic advantage. Cultural participation is therefore shaped not only by the availability of cultural goods but also by the unequal social resources through which their meanings and legitimacy are constructed.

The concept of symbolic boundaries further develops this perspective by showing that cultural classifications are not merely reflections of individual preference. They contribute to the creation of social distinctions, collective identities and hierarchies of worth (Lamont, 1992, 2012). From this standpoint, cultural democracy cannot be

evaluated solely by the number of people who gain access to production or distribution. It must also be examined through the mechanisms that determine which cultural expressions become visible, credible and socially recognised.

Platformisation modifies these mechanisms without eliminating earlier forms of cultural inequality. Digital infrastructures substantially reduce some of the technological, geographical and institutional barriers associated with cultural production and circulation. Individuals can publish, distribute and encounter cultural content without obtaining prior recognition from publishers, broadcasters, galleries or other traditional gatekeepers. This expansion creates historically unprecedented opportunities for cultural participation and may initially appear to realise the normative promises of cultural democracy. Yet the removal of entry barriers does not imply the disappearance of mediation. Instead, mediation is increasingly transferred from public institutions and professional intermediaries to platform operators, recommendation systems and proprietary ranking mechanisms. Cultural visibility is organised through search results, personalised feeds, engagement metrics and algorithmic classifications. Participation consequently depends not only on the capacity to produce or access cultural content, but also on the probability that this content will be selected, displayed and circulated within platform environments.

And this shift changes the nature of cultural inequality, under institution-centred systems, exclusion could frequently be understood in terms of restricted access to recognised institutions, limited educational resources or gatekeeping by cultural professionals. Under platform-centred conditions, inequalities increasingly emerge through differential exposure, discoverability and algorithmically mediated recognition. A cultural expression may be formally available and technically accessible while remaining practically invisible within an environment characterised by content abundance and intense competition for attention. Platform metrics also reshape the relationship between visibility and legitimacy. Indicators such as views, likes, shares, follower counts and watch time function not only as measurements of audience behaviour but also as signals of relevance and value. Their influence may produce cumulative advantages: content that receives early engagement becomes more likely to be recommended, while limited initial visibility can reduce the possibility of subsequent recognition. Cultural participation is therefore governed by recursive processes in which visibility generates engagement, engagement generates data and data influence future visibility.

The relationship between platformisation and cultural democracy is consequently ambivalent. Platforms broaden opportunities for cultural production and reduce

dependence on traditional gatekeepers, but they simultaneously establish new forms of selection whose criteria are commercially oriented, technically opaque and unevenly distributed. The key question is no longer whether individuals can technically participate, but whether participation can be converted into visibility, symbolic recognition and durable cultural presence. This article therefore treats cultural democracy not as an achieved condition resulting from expanded digital access, but as a contested socio-institutional process. The democratic potential of digital participation depends on the organisation of visibility, the distribution of attention and the mechanisms through which cultural expressions acquire legitimacy. Platformisation does not simply extend the traditional paradigms of cultural democratisation and cultural democracy. It introduces a new layer of intermediation that reorganises the conditions under which both access and recognition are distributed.

Taken together, these considerations reveal a central theoretical limitation in existing approaches, because cultural democratisation explains the institutional expansion of access, while cultural democracy provides a normative framework for plurality, participation and cultural rights. Theories of cultural capital and symbolic boundaries explain why participation remains socially differentiated. However, these perspectives do not fully account for the role of platform infrastructures in transforming accessibility into unequal patterns of visibility and recognition. Addressing this unresolved relationship requires conceptualising cultural participation as a multidimensional socio-economic process shaped by institutions, social resources and technological mediation. This constitutes the point of departure for the following section.

2.2. Cultural consumption as a multidimensional socio-economic process

The concept of cultural consumption has undergone profound theoretical development over the past several decades, evolving far beyond conventional economic understandings of consumer behaviour. Whereas neoclassical economics traditionally conceptualised consumption as the final stage of market exchange driven by individual preferences and utility maximisation, cultural consumption cannot be reduced to the acquisition or use of cultural goods. Rather, it constitutes a multidimensional process through which economic transactions, symbolic meanings, social identities and institutional relations intersect. Cultural consumption is therefore simultaneously an economic, social and communicative practice that contributes to the pro-

duction and reproduction of cultural value. This broader understanding has been shaped primarily by cultural sociology and cultural economics. Pierre Bourdieu fundamentally challenged the assumption that cultural preferences emerge solely from individual choice, arguing instead that they are socially structured through unequal distributions of cultural capital, educational resources and social position (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural consumption functions not merely as an expression of taste but as a mechanism through which symbolic distinctions are created, maintained and legitimised. Consumption therefore participates in the reproduction of social hierarchies by transforming cultural competences into forms of symbolic advantage.

Subsequent scholarship has refined rather than rejected Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, Richard A. Peterson and Roger M. Kern (1996) concept of the cultural omnivore demonstrated that contemporary patterns of cultural participation have become more heterogeneous than those associated with traditional distinctions between high and popular culture. As a consequence, higher-status individuals increasingly combine engagement with classical artistic forms and popular cultural products, suggesting that cultural distinction has become more flexible without disappearing altogether. Cultural hierarchies have therefore not dissolved, rather, they have adapted to changing cultural environments in which diversity itself may function as a form of distinction.

Within cultural economics, David Throsby (2001) further expanded the analytical perspective by emphasising the dual character of cultural goods. Cultural products simultaneously possess economic and cultural value, making their consumption fundamentally different from the consumption of ordinary market commodities. Their significance derives not only from exchange value but also from creativity, symbolic meaning, heritage and collective identity. Richard Caves (2000) similarly demonstrated that cultural markets are characterised by uncertainty, differentiated demand and the central importance of symbolic valuation, limiting the explanatory power of conventional market models based exclusively on rational choice and price mechanisms. Together, these perspectives establish that cultural consumption extends well beyond market exchange and it encompasses the continuous production of meanings, identities and systems of cultural legitimacy through which societies define aesthetic value and social recognition. Yet most classical approaches were developed before digital platforms became the dominant infrastructures through which cultural participation is organised. Consequently, they devote relatively limited attention to the technological architectures that increasingly mediate cultural choice, visibility and circulation.

Also, platformisation fundamentally alters the institutional conditions under which cultural consumption occurs. Streaming services, social media platforms,

online marketplaces and algorithmically curated recommendation systems have progressively replaced many traditional intermediaries responsible for connecting cultural producers with audiences. Cultural participation is therefore no longer organised primarily through publishers, galleries, broadcasters or cultural institutions, but increasingly through digital platforms that continuously filter information, rank cultural content and personalise exposure according to behavioural data (van Dijck et al., 2018; Gillespie, 2018; Poell et al., 2022).

This transformation has important theoretical consequences. Cultural consumption can no longer be understood simply as a sequence of autonomous individual choices taking place within relatively neutral markets. Rather, preferences increasingly emerge through continuous interaction between users and algorithmic infrastructures that recommend, prioritise and selectively expose cultural content. Recommendation systems do not merely respond to existing preferences; they participate in their formation by shaping the informational environments within which cultural choices are made. Individual agency therefore operates within technologically structured systems of visibility rather than independently of them. And the transition from ownership to access further reinforces this transformation, whereas previous cultural markets were constrained by physical scarcity and limited distribution channels, platform ecosystems provide users with immediate access to almost unlimited catalogues of cultural content. Paradoxically, this expansion of availability increases rather than reduces the importance of intermediary mechanisms capable of organising informational abundance. In digital environments characterised by content overload, algorithms increasingly perform the economic and cultural function once exercised by institutional gatekeepers.

This observation is closely connected with Herbert Simon's (1971) theory of the attention economy. Simon argued that an abundance of information inevitably generates a scarcity of attention because human cognitive capacities remain limited. Within platform ecosystems, attention becomes one of the most valuable resources governing cultural circulation. Competition increasingly concerns not access to cultural content itself but the ability to attract, retain and monetise audience attention. Visibility consequently emerges as a scarce resource whose distribution profoundly influences both symbolic recognition and economic opportunity.

From this perspective, cultural consumption should be understood as operating simultaneously across three interdependent dimensions. First, it constitutes an economic process, involving the production, circulation and monetisation of cultural goods and services. Second, it represents a symbolic process, through which mean-

ings, identities and cultural legitimacy are negotiated and socially recognised. Third, it functions as a technologically mediated process, in which algorithmic systems increasingly organise visibility, recommendation and patterns of cultural exposure. These dimensions do not operate independently; they interact continuously within platform environments where technological infrastructures simultaneously shape economic transactions and symbolic recognition.

As a consequence, the traditional analytical distinction between production and consumption becomes progressively blurred. Users simultaneously consume, evaluate, recommend, remix, reproduce and circulate cultural content, while platforms transform these activities into behavioural data that generate economic value through advertising, personalisation and algorithmic optimisation. Cultural participation thus becomes embedded within recursive feedback mechanisms in which users not only consume culture but also continuously contribute to the production of the very systems that organise future cultural consumption. This broader understanding significantly extends earlier theories centred exclusively on taste, cultural capital or market demand. While these approaches remain indispensable for explaining social differentiation, they do not fully account for the institutional role of digital platforms in organising cultural visibility and symbolic recognition. Contemporary cultural consumption is increasingly shaped through the interaction of social structures, technological infrastructures and algorithmic governance. Understanding these mechanisms therefore requires closer examination of platformisation and the emergence of the attention economy as defining characteristics of the contemporary cultural landscape.

2.3. Platformisation and algorithmic governance of cultural participation

The expansion of digital platforms has transformed not only the technological architecture of cultural markets but also the institutional mechanisms governing cultural participation. While earlier phases of digitalisation primarily concerned the conversion of analogue content into digital formats, contemporary platformisation represents a broader socio-economic transformation in which digital infrastructures actively organise cultural production, circulation and consumption through interconnected platform ecosystems. Platforms therefore no longer function merely as intermediaries facilitating access to cultural content; they increasingly coordinate market exchange,

regulate visibility and shape the conditions under which cultural participation becomes socially recognised (José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, & Martijn de Waal, 2018).

This institutional transformation has fundamentally altered the role traditionally performed by cultural intermediaries. Publishers, broadcasters, galleries and cultural institutions continue to influence cultural life, yet their authority is increasingly complemented and, in some contexts, partially displaced, by platform operators whose recommendation systems, ranking mechanisms and governance models organise cultural exposure at an unprecedented scale. Rather than eliminating mediation, platformisation redistributes intermediary power by embedding cultural circulation within proprietary technological infrastructures. As a consequence, cultural participation is progressively shaped not only by institutional legitimacy or individual cultural capital but also by the operational logics of digital platforms.

This redistribution of intermediary authority is closely associated with the emergence of algorithmic governance. Tarleton Gillespie (2018) argues that algorithms should not be understood simply as technical instruments for organising information. They function as systems of governance that establish the conditions under which digital content becomes visible, recommended, moderated and publicly recognised. Although these processes are frequently presented as neutral or automated, they are embedded within commercial objectives, platform-specific governance models and data-driven optimisation strategies. Algorithms therefore participate directly in the social construction of cultural relevance by continuously filtering information and prioritising particular forms of visibility.

The growing influence of algorithmic governance reflects a broader transformation of contemporary societies often described as deep mediatization. According to Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017), digital infrastructures have evolved beyond communication technologies into institutional environments through which social relations, cultural practices and economic interactions are increasingly organised. Platforms consequently operate not merely as technological tools but as socio-technical institutions that reshape how individuals interact with culture, construct identities and negotiate symbolic legitimacy.

From an economic perspective, this transformation has also been conceptualised as the emergence of platform capitalism. Nick Srnicek (2017) demonstrates that contemporary platforms derive competitive advantage not primarily from the production of cultural goods themselves but from their capacity to collect behavioural data, organise digital interactions and monetise user engagement. Within cultural markets, data become a strategic economic resource through which platforms conti-

nuously refine recommendation systems, personalise cultural exposure and optimise audience retention. Cultural participation thus generates value not only through consumption but also through the continuous production of behavioural information.

These developments fundamentally alter the mechanisms through which cultural visibility is allocated. In environments characterised by an abundance of cultural content, visibility becomes a scarce resource requiring continuous organisation. Recommendation systems, search rankings and personalised interfaces increasingly determine which creators, cultural products and artistic expressions are encountered by audiences. Consequently, participation no longer depends exclusively on the possibility of producing or accessing cultural content, it increasingly depends on the probability of being algorithmically selected and presented within users' information environments. This transformation closely corresponds to Herbert A. Simon's (1971) theory of the attention economy, which argues that an abundance of information inevitably produces a scarcity of human attention. Within contemporary platform ecosystems, attention functions as one of the principal economic resources governing cultural circulation. Competition therefore concerns not merely the production of cultural content but the capacity to attract, maintain and convert audience attention into measurable engagement. Visibility becomes both an economic asset and a symbolic resource through which cultural legitimacy is increasingly negotiated.

Platform metrics reinforce these dynamics by transforming audience behaviour into systems of evaluation. Indicators such as views, likes, shares, watch time and follower counts perform a dual function. On the one hand, they measure user engagement; on the other, they operate as signals of cultural relevance that influence subsequent recommendation processes. Visibility therefore becomes self-reinforcing, it means content receiving early engagement is more likely to be recommended again, generating cumulative advantages that shape both symbolic recognition and economic opportunity. Algorithmic recommendation thus contributes to the concentration of visibility despite the expansion of opportunities for participation.

The implications of this process extend beyond technological mediation, platformisation increasingly restructures the relationship between accessibility, recognition and value creation. Cultural participation remains formally open to an unprecedented number of creators, yet the distribution of visibility is progressively governed through opaque computational processes whose operational principles remain largely inaccessible to users. The result is a paradox characteristic of platform societies, where digital abundance coexists with increasing concentration of attention, symbolic legitimacy and monetisation opportunities. Recent scholarship has examined

these developments from multiple theoretical perspectives, including platform society (van Dijck et al., 2018), platform capitalism (Srnicke, 2017) and data colonialism (Nick Couldry & Ulises A. Mejias, 2019). Despite important conceptual differences, these approaches converge in recognising that digital platforms have become influential socio-economic institutions shaping markets, communication and cultural life. However, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to explaining how these institutional transformations reshape the socio-economic mechanisms of cultural consumption itself, particularly through the interaction between algorithmic visibility, symbolic recognition and cultural inequality.

This unresolved relationship constitutes the principal theoretical challenge addressed in this article. Rather than conceptualising platforms exclusively as technological infrastructures or commercial enterprises, the proposed perspective understands them as institutional mechanisms linking accessibility, visibility, symbolic recognition and socio-economic differentiation. From this standpoint, platformisation should not be interpreted simply as the expansion of digital participation but as the progressive reorganisation of the processes through which cultural legitimacy and value are produced within platform-mediated environments. These considerations provide the theoretical foundation for the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework, introduced in the following section.

Table 1. Major theoretical perspectives on platformisation and cultural participation

Perspective	Key authors	Principal contribution	Limitation addressed by PMCS
Platform society	van Dijck, Poell and de Waal	Institutional role of platforms	Limited focus on cultural stratification
Algorithmic governance	Gillespie	Visibility and recommendation	Limited integration with cultural sociology
Deep mediatisation	Couldry and Hepp	Transformation of social institutions	Weak connection to cultural consumption
Platform capitalism	Srnicke	Data extraction and economic logic	Limited attention to symbolic recognition
Data colonialism	Couldry and Mejias	Data appropriation	Does not explain mechanisms of cultural value

Source: author's own elaboration based on José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018); Tarleton Gillespie (2018); Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017); Nick Srnicke (2017); and Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias (2019)

2.4. The Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework

The preceding discussion demonstrates that existing theoretical approaches have substantially advanced the understanding of cultural participation, platformisation and algorithmic governance. Cultural sociology explains how cultural capital and symbolic boundaries reproduce social inequalities, while platform studies reveal the institutional role of digital infrastructures in organising cultural production and circulation. Likewise, cultural economics highlights the dual economic and symbolic character of cultural goods, despite these important contributions, no existing framework fully explains how digital accessibility is progressively transformed into unequal distributions of visibility, symbolic recognition and cultural value within platform-mediated environments.

This article argues that these transformations cannot be adequately understood by examining accessibility, algorithms or cultural consumption in isolation. Instead, they should be conceptualised as successive and interdependent stages within a broader socio-economic process through which platform infrastructures reshape cultural participation. The proposed Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework addresses this theoretical gap by integrating insights from cultural sociology, communication studies, platform studies and cultural economics into a single explanatory model.

Illustrative empirical measures:

Stage 1:

- Illustrative empirical measures
- Internet penetration (Eurostat)
- DESI/Digital Decade indicators
- Household Internet access

Stage 2:

- Platform market shares
- AI recommendation systems
- Use of streaming services

Stage 3:

- Time spent online
- Engagement rates
- Audience concentration

Stage 4:

- CCS employment
- Income of creators
- Creative Economy statistics

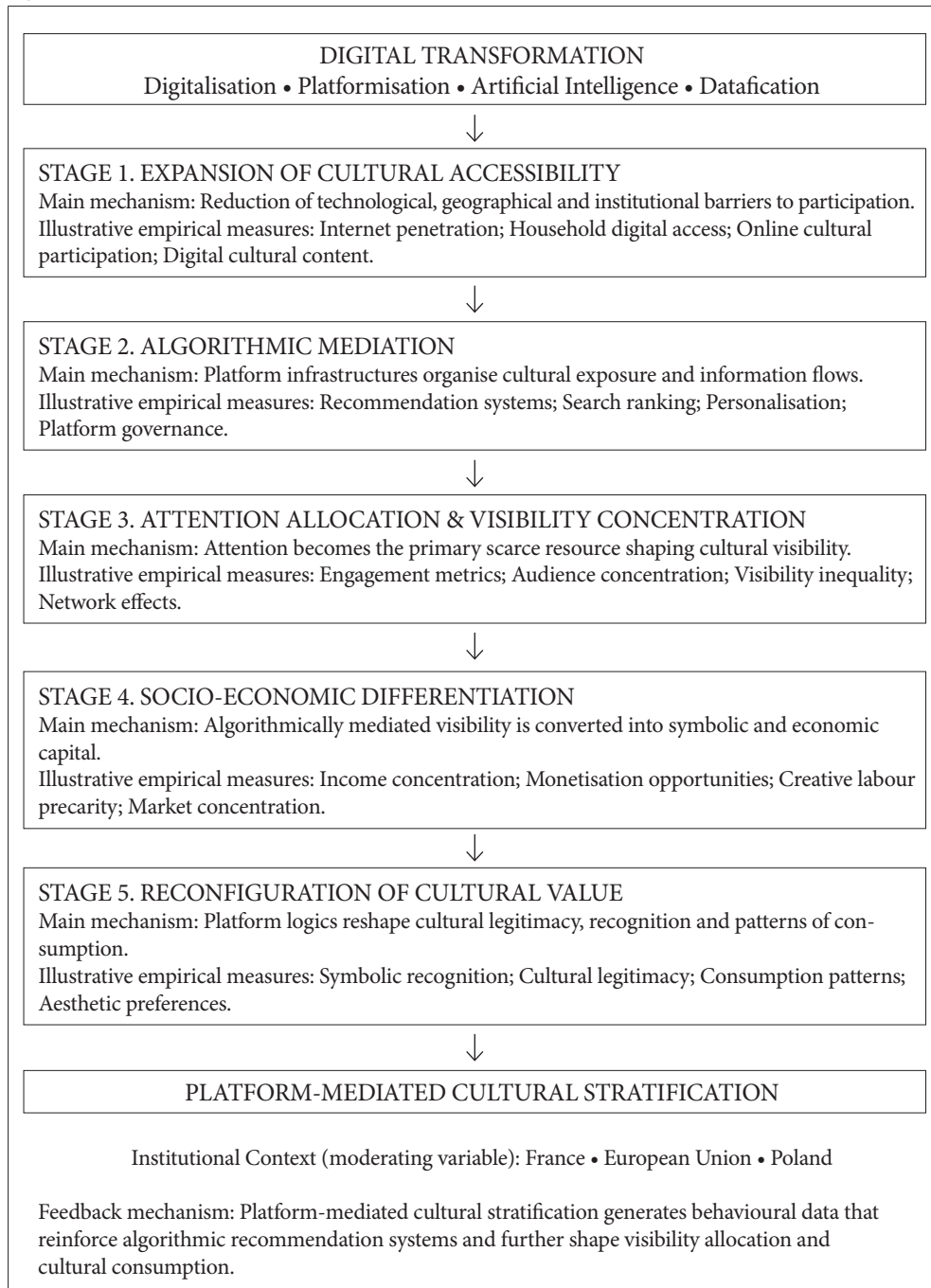
Stage 5:

- Survey results
- Qualitative interviews
- Changes in aesthetic preferences
- Digital ethnography

Institutional context (moderating variable)

France ————— European Union ————— Poland

Feedback mechanism: Platform-mediated cultural stratification continuously generates behavioural data, which reinforce algorithmic recommendation systems and further influence visibility allocation and cultural consumption. The PMCS Model serves as the principal analytical framework guiding the empirical interpretation presented in Section 4.

Figure 1. Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification Model (PMCS)

Source: author's own elaboration

The PMCS Framework conceptualises platform-mediated cultural stratification as a cumulative process consisting of five sequential stages. Rather than representing isolated phenomena, these stages form an integrated mechanism in which each phase creates the structural conditions for the emergence of the next. Accessibility expands cultural participation, algorithmic systems organise exposure, visibility becomes increasingly concentrated, socio-economic differentiation emerges through unequal recognition and monetisation, and these processes ultimately reshape the production of cultural value itself.

Importantly, the framework does not propose a deterministic sequence in which every creator follows an identical trajectory. Instead, it identifies the dominant structural mechanisms through which platform ecosystems progressively reorganise cultural participation under conditions of digital abundance. The model therefore captures both technological mediation and the social production of inequality by demonstrating how algorithmic infrastructures influence the distribution of symbolic and economic resources.

Furthermore, the PMCS Framework incorporates a recursive feedback mechanism. Cultural interactions continuously generate behavioural data that are reintegrated into recommendation algorithms, influencing subsequent processes of visibility allocation. Platform-mediated cultural stratification should therefore be understood as a dynamic and self-reinforcing system in which user behaviour simultaneously constitutes both the outcome and the input of algorithmic governance. Unlike existing theoretical perspectives, which typically analyse either platform infrastructures, cultural inequalities or economic mechanisms separately, the PMCS Framework conceptualises these dimensions as components of a single socio-economic process. In doing so, it provides an analytical framework capable of explaining how digital democratisation of cultural access may coexist with increasing concentration of visibility, symbolic recognition and economic opportunities.

The following sections discuss each stage of the framework in greater detail, demonstrating how their cumulative interaction contributes to the emergence of new forms of cultural stratification within contemporary platform societies.

2.4.1. Stage 1: Expansion of cultural accessibility

The first stage of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework is characterised by the unprecedented expansion of cultural accessibility resulting from digital transformation and the widespread diffusion of platform infrastructures.

Digital technologies have significantly reduced many of the traditional barriers that historically constrained participation in cultural production and distribution, including geographical distance, production costs, institutional gatekeeping and technical limitations. As a consequence, individuals now possess substantially greater opportunities to create, disseminate and access cultural content than at any previous stage of media development.

This transformation represents one of the most significant achievements of the digital era. Online platforms have democratised access to cultural production by enabling creators to publish artistic, educational and creative content independently of traditional intermediaries such as publishing houses, broadcasting organisations, galleries or cultural institutions. Digital participation has therefore become increasingly decentralised, allowing a far broader range of individuals to contribute to cultural life. From the perspective of cultural democracy, this development appears to fulfil long-standing aspirations for broader participation in cultural production and expression. The reduction of institutional barriers enables creators from diverse social, geographical and cultural backgrounds to enter cultural markets without obtaining prior approval from established gatekeepers. Digital infrastructures thus facilitate greater plurality of voices and significantly expand opportunities for creative participation.

However, the PMCS Framework argues that increased accessibility should not be equated with equality of participation. The removal of formal barriers represents only the initial condition within a much broader process of cultural stratification. Accessibility creates opportunities for participation, but it does not determine whether cultural expressions will become visible, recognised or economically sustainable. Consequently, accessibility should be understood as a necessary, but insufficient, condition for cultural democratisation. And this distinction is particularly important in platform environments characterised by information abundance. The dramatic reduction in publication costs has resulted in exponential growth in the volume of available cultural content across virtually every creative sector. Millions of users simultaneously produce videos, photographs, illustrations, podcasts, digital artworks and written content, creating an environment in which the principal challenge is no longer production itself but the ability to attract public attention. The abundance of cultural production therefore generates new forms of competition that emerge after access has already been achieved.

From an economic perspective, digital accessibility has substantially lowered entry costs while simultaneously intensifying competitive pressure, because markets characterised by limited institutional barriers often experience increasing oversupply, making visibility rather than production capacity the principal scarce resource.

In cultural industries, this phenomenon contributes to heightened uncertainty regarding both economic returns and symbolic recognition, particularly for independent creators whose work competes within highly saturated digital environments.

Accessibility also transforms the role of audiences and users no longer function exclusively as consumers of cultural goods but increasingly participate as creators, curators, commentators and distributors of cultural content. The distinction between production and consumption consequently becomes progressively blurred, reinforcing participatory forms of cultural engagement while simultaneously increasing the overall volume of competing cultural expressions. Importantly, the expansion of accessibility does not eliminate social inequalities inherited from earlier institutional systems. Differences in educational background, digital literacy, economic resources, professional networks and technological competences continue to influence creators' capacities to produce high-quality content and maintain sustained participation. Digital accessibility therefore broadens opportunities without entirely removing pre-existing structural asymmetries.

Within the PMCS Framework, Stage 1 constitutes the enabling condition from which subsequent mechanisms emerge. By dramatically expanding the number of cultural actors participating in digital environments, accessibility creates informational abundance that exceeds the cognitive capacities of individual users. This imbalance generates the need for technological systems capable of organising, filtering and prioritising cultural content. Consequently, the expansion of accessibility itself produces the structural conditions under which algorithmic mediation becomes indispensable.

The transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2 therefore reflects a fundamental paradox of digital democratisation. The success of digital accessibility simultaneously creates the necessity for new systems of selection. As the volume of available cultural content continues to expand, platform algorithms assume an increasingly central role in determining what becomes visible, discoverable and culturally significant. Accessibility thus marks not the conclusion of democratisation but the beginning of a new process through which cultural participation becomes progressively mediated by computational infrastructures.

Table 2. Transformation of cultural accessibility in the digital environment

Dimension	Pre-platform era	Platform era
Access to publication	Institutional gatekeepers	Open self-publication
Production costs	High	Low

Dimension	Pre-platform era	Platform era
Distribution	Limited geographical reach	Global digital distribution
Audience access	Restricted	Immediate and continuous
Role of users	Consumers	Producers, consumers and curators
Principal barrier	Entry into the cultural market	Visibility within information abundance

Source: author's own elaboration based on Pierre Bourdieu (1984); David Throsby (2001); José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018); Tarleton Gillespie (2018); Nick Srnicek (2017)

2.4.2. Stage 2: Algorithmic mediation

The second stage of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework concerns the emergence of algorithmic mediation as the principal mechanism organising cultural participation within digital platform ecosystems. While the first stage expands opportunities for cultural production and access, the exponential growth of available content simultaneously creates the necessity for systems capable of filtering, prioritising and distributing information. Algorithmic mediation therefore emerges not as an accidental technological development but as a structural response to the conditions of digital abundance. Unlike traditional cultural intermediaries, whose decisions were generally visible and institutionally identifiable, algorithmic systems operate through continuous computational processes that dynamically rank, recommend and personalise cultural content. Their objective is not merely to facilitate information retrieval but to optimise user engagement by predicting behavioural preferences and maximising the likelihood of continued interaction. As a result, recommendation algorithms increasingly determine which cultural expressions become visible, which creators reach audiences and which forms of cultural production remain largely undiscovered.

This transformation fundamentally modifies the nature of mediation. Historically, cultural selection was primarily exercised by publishers, editors, museum curators, critics and broadcasting organisations whose authority derived from professional expertise and institutional legitimacy. Platform ecosystems do not eliminate these actors but increasingly supplement and, in some sectors supersede, their role through automated systems that continuously evaluate behavioural signals generated by millions of users. The locus of cultural selection thus shifts from identifiable institutional actors towards opaque computational infrastructures.

Importantly, algorithmic mediation should not be interpreted as technologically neutral. Recommendation systems are designed according to specific commercial objectives that prioritise user retention, engagement and platform profitability. Consequently, algorithms optimise cultural exposure according to behavioural performance rather than artistic quality, educational value or cultural significance. Metrics such as watch time, click-through rates, session duration and interaction frequency become influential variables shaping future visibility. This shift has important sociological implications. Rather than selecting cultural content directly, algorithms construct probabilistic environments within which future choices become increasingly structured. Users continue to exercise agency, yet their decisions occur within recommendation architectures that systematically privilege certain forms of content while marginalising others. Individual preference and algorithmic recommendation therefore become mutually constitutive rather than analytically independent processes.

The recursive character of algorithmic mediation further distinguishes platform ecosystems from previous forms of cultural organisation. Every interaction, including viewing, scrolling, liking, sharing, commenting or abandoning content, generates behavioural data that are continuously incorporated into subsequent recommendation processes. User behaviour therefore becomes simultaneously the product and the input of algorithmic governance and recommendation systems learn from previous interactions while progressively shaping future patterns of cultural participation.

From an economic perspective, algorithmic mediation substantially reduces search costs associated with navigating increasingly saturated cultural markets. However, this efficiency simultaneously concentrates informational power within platform operators that control recommendation architectures. Cultural producers consequently compete not only for audience attention but also for algorithmic compatibility. Increasingly, creators adapt production strategies to anticipated platform preferences by optimising publication frequency, content duration, visual design, metadata and interaction patterns. Creative practice itself gradually becomes responsive to algorithmic expectations.

Algorithmic mediation also transforms symbolic recognition. Visibility is no longer determined primarily by institutional validation or professional critical evaluation but increasingly by computational systems that continuously assess audience engagement. As algorithmic recommendation amplifies already successful content, cumulative advantage mechanisms become progressively reinforced. Cultural expressions receiving favourable initial exposure generate more behavioural data, increasing the probability of subsequent recommendation and further strengthening their visibility. Conversely, content receiving limited initial exposure may remain effectively invi-

sible despite its artistic or cultural merit. This recursive concentration of visibility illustrates one of the central propositions of the PMCS Framework. Algorithmic mediation does not simply distribute existing cultural demand; it actively participates in constructing patterns of cultural recognition. Recommendation systems therefore function as institutional actors influencing both symbolic legitimacy and economic opportunity through continuous processes of computational selection.

The implications extend beyond individual creators, because algorithmically mediated visibility increasingly influences broader cultural repertoires by determining which aesthetic forms, communicative styles and creative practices receive sustained exposure. Over time, repeated recommendation of similar content may contribute to processes of aesthetic convergence, encouraging creators to adopt formats, themes and visual conventions associated with higher algorithmic performance. Diversity of participation may therefore coexist with increasing standardisation of cultural visibility.

Within the PMCS Framework, Stage 2 constitutes the mechanism through which digital accessibility is transformed into selective exposure. Algorithms become the principal infrastructure governing cultural circulation by organising informational abundance into differentiated patterns of visibility. Yet algorithmic mediation does not itself produce stratification. Rather, it establishes the structural conditions under which visibility becomes progressively concentrated, giving rise to the third stage of the framework: Algorithmic Allocation of Visibility.

Table 3. Transformation of cultural mediation

Dimension	Traditional mediation	Algorithmic mediation
Principal intermediary	Editors, curators, publishers	Recommendation algorithms
Selection criteria	Professional judgement	Behavioural optimisation
Decision process	Human evaluation	Computational prediction
Visibility	Editorial selection	Personalised recommendation
Feedback	Limited	Continuous behavioural learning
Primary objective	Cultural dissemination	Engagement optimisation

Source: author’s own elaboration based on Tarleton Gillespie (2018); José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018); Nick Srnicek (2017); Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017)

2.4.3. Stage 3: Algorithmic Allocation of Visibility

The third stage of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework represents the pivotal transition from algorithmic mediation to observable patterns

of cultural inequality. While Stage 2 explains how digital platforms organise cultural exposure through computational recommendation systems, Stage 3 examines the consequences of these processes for the distribution of visibility. It is at this point that differences in algorithmic exposure become translated into unequal opportunities for cultural recognition, audience formation and symbolic legitimacy.

Visibility occupies a distinctive position within platform-mediated environments because it functions simultaneously as a communicative, cultural and economic resource. Unlike traditional media systems, where visibility was largely determined by editorial decisions and institutional gatekeeping, platform ecosystems continuously allocate exposure through algorithmic ranking, recommendation and personalisation. Cultural content is therefore not merely published; it is selectively surfaced to different audiences according to computational assessments of predicted engagement and behavioural relevance. Within this context, visibility should not be understood simply as public exposure. Rather, it constitutes a relational mechanism through which creators, cultural products and symbolic meanings become incorporated into broader processes of social recognition. Content that remains technically available but is rarely recommended occupies a fundamentally different social position from content that is repeatedly amplified through algorithmic distribution. The distinction between availability and visibility therefore becomes central to understanding contemporary cultural participation.

The PMCS Framework argues that algorithmic visibility operates through cumulative allocation rather than equal distribution. Recommendation systems continuously interpret behavioural signals—including viewing duration, interaction frequency, sharing behaviour and audience retention, to estimate the probability that particular content will generate further engagement. Because these calculations are recursively updated, early differences in exposure may become progressively amplified through subsequent recommendation cycles. Initial visibility therefore increases the likelihood of future visibility, producing self-reinforcing dynamics that resemble cumulative advantage processes described in the sociology of science and social stratification.

From a sociological perspective, visibility increasingly functions as a form of symbolic capital within platform ecosystems. Whereas Pierre Bourdieu conceptualised symbolic capital as recognition derived from socially legitimised forms of prestige, digital platforms introduce computational mechanisms through which visibility itself becomes an important source of legitimacy. High levels of exposure generate larger audiences, greater social recognition and enhanced opportunities for collaboration, professional advancement and economic monetisation. Symbolic recognition is there-

fore increasingly intertwined with algorithmically mediated patterns of visibility. These developments also influence the production of cultural expectations, where creators progressively learn which formats, visual conventions, publication rhythms and communicative styles receive favourable algorithmic treatment. Rather than responding exclusively to artistic intentions or audience demand, creative decisions increasingly incorporate expectations concerning platform optimisation. The anticipation of algorithmic evaluation consequently becomes embedded within creative practice itself, encouraging strategic adaptation to platform-specific performance indicators.

Importantly, this adaptive behaviour does not imply that algorithms determine cultural outcomes in a deterministic manner. Individual creativity, audience preferences, cultural context and institutional support continue to influence cultural success. Nevertheless, these factors increasingly operate within computational environments that distribute opportunities for recognition unevenly. Algorithmic visibility therefore functions as a probabilistic rather than deterministic mechanism of cultural differentiation. The concentration of visibility also has important implications for cultural diversity. Although digital platforms substantially expand opportunities for participation, audience attention becomes disproportionately focused on a relatively limited proportion of available cultural content. Consequently, increasing diversity of production may coexist with concentration of consumption. Platform ecosystems simultaneously generate unprecedented cultural abundance and selective concentration of public attention, reinforcing asymmetries between highly visible creators and the much larger population of participants whose work receives limited exposure.

From an economic perspective, visibility increasingly constitutes an intangible asset that precedes value creation. Advertising revenue, sponsorship agreements, subscription models, licensing opportunities and commercial partnerships all depend, to varying degrees, upon sustained audience attention. Visibility therefore functions not only as symbolic recognition but also as a prerequisite for economic accumulation. The allocation of visibility consequently shapes the future distribution of material opportunities across cultural markets.

Within the PMCS Framework, Stage 3 represents the critical turning point at which algorithmic governance begins to generate measurable patterns of cultural stratification. Accessibility has already been democratised, and mediation has become algorithmic. Visibility now emerges as the principal scarce resource governing both symbolic recognition and future economic potential. The unequal distribution of this resource establishes the structural conditions through which socio-economic differentiation develops during the fourth stage of the framework.

Table 4. Visibility as a strategic resource in platform ecosystems

Dimension	Traditional cultural systems	Platform ecosystems
Source of visibility	Editorial and institutional selection	Algorithmic recommendation
Distribution logic	Periodic and relatively stable	Continuous and dynamic
Principal evaluation criteria	Professional judgement	Behavioural performance
Symbolic consequence	Institutional recognition	Algorithmically amplified recognition
Economic consequence	Professional reputation	Monetisation through audience scale

Source: author's own elaboration based on Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Tarleton Gillespie (2018); José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018); Nick Srnicek (2017)

2.4.4. Stage 4: Socio-economic differentiation

The fourth stage of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework examines how persistent inequalities emerge from the cumulative allocation of algorithmic visibility. Whereas the previous stages describe the expansion of accessibility and the computational organisation of cultural exposure, Stage 4 explains how differences in visibility are progressively converted into unequal distributions of symbolic recognition, economic opportunities and professional sustainability. At this stage, platform-mediated visibility ceases to function solely as a communicative resource and increasingly becomes a mechanism of socio-economic differentiation.

The PMCS Framework argues that digital platforms do not create inequality *ex nihilo*, they reorganise existing forms of social differentiation by introducing new mechanisms through which symbolic and economic resources are accumulated. Traditional inequalities associated with education, cultural capital, institutional affiliation and professional networks continue to influence participation. However, these factors become increasingly intertwined with algorithmically mediated systems of visibility that shape access to audiences, collaborations and sources of income. This interaction generates cumulative processes of advantage and disadvantage. Creators who achieve sustained visibility are more likely to attract followers, develop stable communities, receive sponsorship opportunities and secure commercial partnerships. Increased exposure also facilitates invitations to professional events, institutional collaborations and media appearances, reinforcing symbolic legitimacy alongside economic gains. Visibility therefore becomes progressively convertible into multiple forms of capital, including economic, social and symbolic capital.

Conversely, creators who receive limited algorithmic exposure encounter structural barriers that extend beyond reduced audience reach. Restricted visibility constrains opportunities for monetisation, weakens professional recognition and limits participation in broader cultural networks. Even high-quality cultural production may struggle to achieve sustainability when it remains largely absent from algorithmically curated information environments. Socio-economic differentiation therefore arises not exclusively from differences in creative ability but from unequal opportunities for visibility and recognition. This process illustrates an important transformation in the relationship between cultural production and labour. Within platform ecosystems, creative work increasingly depends upon continuous audience engagement, regular content production and sustained interaction with algorithmic systems. Professional success is shaped not only by artistic competence but also by the capacity to adapt to rapidly evolving platform logics, maintain digital presence and respond to changing patterns of audience behaviour. Creative labour consequently becomes characterised by increasing precarity, flexibility and dependence on infrastructures beyond the direct control of cultural producers.

The economic consequences of this transformation extend to the broader organisation of cultural markets. Platform ecosystems tend to reward disproportionate levels of visibility, producing highly unequal distributions of attention and income. A relatively small proportion of creators often captures the majority of audience engagement, advertising revenues and commercial opportunities, while the overwhelming majority compete for limited visibility despite substantial creative investment. Such dynamics resemble the winner-takes-most patterns observed across digital markets, where modest differences in visibility generate disproportionately large differences in economic outcomes.

From a sociological perspective, these developments reshape the distribution of symbolic legitimacy. Recognition increasingly depends upon publicly observable platform metrics that function as indicators of credibility, influence and cultural relevance. Numbers of followers, views, subscribers or interactions are frequently interpreted as proxies for quality, expertise or artistic significance, despite primarily reflecting previous patterns of algorithmic exposure and audience engagement. Quantitative metrics thus become integrated into contemporary systems of symbolic evaluation, reinforcing existing advantages while making inequalities more visible and socially reproducible.

The PMCS Framework therefore conceptualises socio-economic differentiation as a multidimensional process operating simultaneously across economic, social

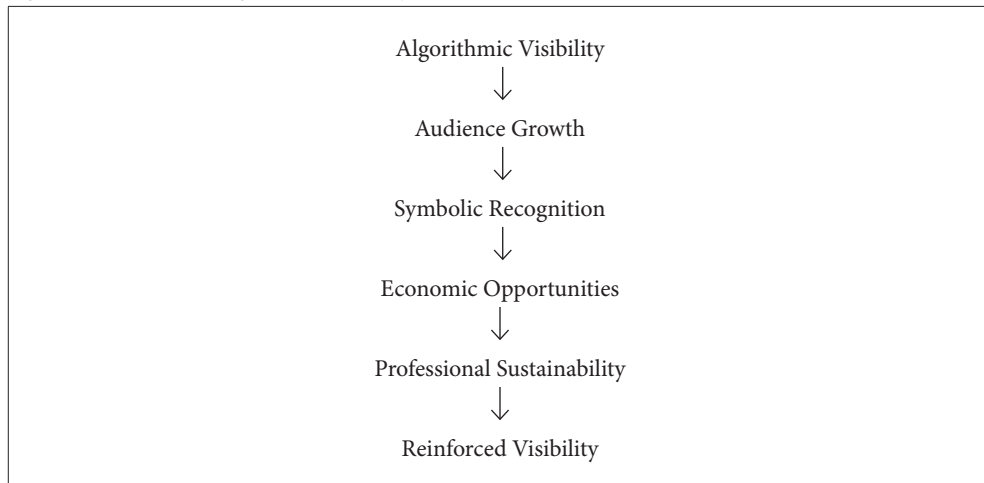
and symbolic domains. Economic inequalities concern disparities in monetisation opportunities and financial sustainability. Social inequalities emerge through differential access to professional networks, collaborations and institutional recognition. Symbolic inequalities involve the uneven distribution of legitimacy, prestige and cultural influence. These dimensions interact continuously, creating self-reinforcing trajectories of cumulative advantage within platform-mediated cultural environments. Importantly, socio-economic differentiation should not be interpreted as an inevitable consequence of technological innovation alone. Institutional policies, public cultural programmes, educational opportunities and regulatory frameworks continue to influence how platform ecosystems distribute opportunities for participation and recognition. Nevertheless, within increasingly digital cultural markets, algorithmically mediated visibility has become a decisive intermediary linking technological infrastructures with broader processes of social stratification.

Within the PMCS Framework, Stage 4 demonstrates how inequalities that initially appear as differences in digital exposure gradually evolve into durable disparities in professional opportunity, economic sustainability and symbolic status. Visibility is transformed into capital, and capital subsequently reinforces visibility through recursive processes of recognition and accumulation. These dynamics establish the conditions under which platform ecosystems begin to reshape not only patterns of participation but also the very criteria through which cultural value is defined. This transformation constitutes the fifth and final stage of the framework.

Table 5. Dimensions of socio-economic differentiation in platform ecosystems

Dimension	Mechanism	Principal outcome
Economic	Monetisation, sponsorships, advertising, subscriptions	Income inequality
Social	Networks, collaborations, institutional recognition	Unequal professional opportunities
Symbolic	Visibility, legitimacy, reputation	Concentration of cultural prestige
Professional	Platform optimisation, audience management	Precarious creative labour
Structural	Recursive accumulation of visibility and capital	Platform-mediated cultural stratification

Source: author's own elaboration based on Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Richard E. Caves (2000); David Throsby (2001); Nick Srnicek (2017); José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018); Tarleton Gillespie (2018)

Figure 2. Conversion of algorithmic visibility into socio-economic capital

Source: author's own elaboration based on Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Richard E. Caves (2000), David Throsby (2001), Tarleton Gillespie (2018), Nick Srnicek (2017), and José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018)

The mechanism presented in Figure 2 illustrates one of the central propositions of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework. Within platform ecosystems, algorithmic visibility functions as the primary mechanism through which symbolic and economic resources are progressively accumulated. Rather than constituting an end in itself, visibility initiates a cumulative process in which increased audience exposure generates symbolic recognition, expands economic opportunities and strengthens the long-term sustainability of creative activity. These outcomes subsequently reinforce future visibility, creating a recursive cycle of cumulative advantage.

Importantly, this process should not be interpreted as deterministic. Algorithmic visibility does not automatically guarantee professional success, nor does limited visibility necessarily indicate lower creative quality. Instead, the framework emphasises that platform infrastructures significantly influence the probability that cultural production will be recognised, monetised and institutionally legitimised. Visibility therefore operates as an intermediary variable linking technological mediation with broader socio-economic outcomes.

Figure 2 also demonstrates that contemporary cultural stratification extends beyond unequal access to cultural production. Under platform conditions, inequalities increasingly emerge through differential opportunities to convert visibility into symbolic recognition, professional legitimacy and economic capital. Consequently, platform-

-mediated cultural stratification should be understood as a dynamic process of cumulative resource conversion rather than as a static distribution of cultural participation.

While Figure 1 presents the overall sequential architecture of the PMCS Framework, Figure 2 focuses on one of its key internal mechanisms by illustrating how algorithmically allocated visibility is progressively converted into symbolic recognition, economic opportunities and reinforced cultural advantage.

2.4.5. Stage 5: Reconfiguration of cultural value

The fifth and final stage of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework concerns the reconfiguration of cultural value resulting from the cumulative interaction between accessibility, algorithmic mediation, visibility allocation and socio-economic differentiation. Whereas the preceding stages explain how platform infrastructures organise cultural participation and distribute opportunities for recognition, Stage 5 examines the broader consequences of these processes for the production, evaluation and legitimisation of cultural value itself. Within traditional cultural systems, value was predominantly established through institutional processes involving cultural organisations, educational institutions, professional critics, museums, publishers and recognised artistic communities. Although these mechanisms were never entirely free from social inequalities, they generally relied upon relatively stable institutional frameworks through which aesthetic quality, professional expertise and cultural significance were evaluated over extended periods of time.

Platform ecosystems introduce a substantially different logic of valuation. Cultural value increasingly emerges from continuous interactions between creators, audiences and algorithmic systems that dynamically evaluate behavioural performance. Recommendation algorithms, engagement metrics and audience interactions become integrated into the processes through which cultural relevance is recognised and circulated. Consequently, value is no longer determined exclusively through institutional validation but increasingly through computationally mediated systems of visibility and participation.

The PMCS Framework argues that this transformation should not be interpreted simply as a replacement of traditional cultural institutions by digital platforms. Rather, platformisation generates hybrid systems of valuation in which institutional recognition, audience participation and algorithmic recommendation interact continuously. Museums, universities, publishers and cultural organisations remain influential actors, yet their authority increasingly coexists with platform metrics that shape public perceptions of relevance, popularity and legitimacy.

An important consequence of this transformation concerns the growing convergence between symbolic value and measurable engagement. Platform indicators such as views, shares, comments, follower numbers and interaction rates frequently become proxies for cultural importance. Although these metrics primarily reflect behavioural activity, they are often interpreted by audiences, commercial partners and even cultural institutions as indicators of influence, quality or professional credibility. Quantitative performance therefore acquires increasing symbolic significance within contemporary cultural markets.

This convergence also influences creative practice, because cultural producers increasingly anticipate the evaluative criteria embedded within platform infrastructures and adapt creative strategies accordingly. Decisions regarding aesthetic form, publication frequency, content duration, visual composition and narrative structure are progressively informed not only by artistic intentions but also by expectations concerning algorithmic performance. The production of culture thus becomes increasingly intertwined with optimisation strategies designed to enhance visibility and audience engagement. At the same time, platformisation creates a fundamental paradox. Never before have such large numbers of individuals possessed opportunities to participate in cultural production, yet never before has cultural evaluation depended so extensively upon continuously measured behavioural performance. Democratisation of access therefore coexists with increasing standardisation of evaluation. Diversity of creators expands, while the mechanisms through which cultural success is recognised become progressively more homogeneous.

From a sociological perspective, this transformation contributes to the emergence of new symbolic hierarchies. Recognition is no longer derived solely from professional expertise or institutional legitimacy but increasingly from algorithmically mediated public attention. Cultural prestige consequently becomes distributed across hybrid systems combining institutional authority, audience participation and computational evaluation. These overlapping mechanisms redefine how legitimacy is constructed within contemporary platform societies.

Economically, the reconfiguration of cultural value also reshapes the organisation of creative industries. Cultural products increasingly derive market value not only from their intrinsic qualities or artistic innovation but from their capacity to generate sustained visibility, audience engagement and data production. Behavioural performance itself becomes incorporated into processes of economic valuation, reinforcing the strategic importance of algorithmic visibility throughout cultural markets.

The PMCS Framework therefore conceptualises cultural value as an emergent property produced through the interaction of technological infrastructures, social recognition and economic exchange. Value is neither exclusively determined by institutional authority nor entirely governed by algorithmic systems. Instead, it develops through recursive relationships linking accessibility, visibility, symbolic legitimacy and economic accumulation. Platform-mediated cultural stratification consequently transforms not only who participates in cultural production but also the criteria through which cultural significance is socially recognised and economically rewarded.

This final stage completes the sequential logic of the PMCS Framework. The model demonstrates that digital transformation does not merely expand participation or introduce new technological intermediaries. Rather, it progressively reorganises the institutional, symbolic and economic foundations through which cultural value is produced, distributed and legitimised. Understanding these cumulative processes provides the basis for analysing contemporary cultural participation as a dynamic system of platform-mediated stratification rather than as a simple consequence of technological innovation.

Table 6. Transformation of cultural value under platformisation

Dimension	Institutional cultural systems	Platform-mediated cultural systems
Primary source of legitimacy	Cultural institutions	Hybrid institutional and algorithmic recognition
Evaluation criteria	Expertise, criticism, artistic merit	Engagement metrics and algorithmic visibility
Cultural authority	Professional gatekeepers	Platforms, audiences and institutions
Value creation	Institutional recognition	Visibility, participation and data
Dominant logic	Cultural evaluation	Continuous socio-technical evaluation

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Pierre Bourdieu (1984); David Throsby (2001); José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018); Tarleton Gillespie (2018); Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017); Nick Srnicek (2017)

2.4.6. Dynamic feedback mechanism and theoretical implications of the PMCS Framework

The Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework should be understood as a dynamic rather than linear model of cultural transformation. Although the five stages are presented sequentially for analytical clarity, they operate through continuous feedback relationships that characterise contemporary platform ecosystems. Behavioural data generated through cultural participation continuously inform algorithmic systems, influencing subsequent processes of recommendation, visibility allocation and audience engagement. As a result, cultural stratification evolves recursively rather than through isolated stages. This dynamic perspective highlights the distinctive contribution of the PMCS Framework. Existing research has extensively examined digital participation, platformisation, algorithmic governance and cultural inequalities as related but largely separate phenomena. The PMCS Framework integrates these perspectives into a single explanatory model demonstrating how expanded accessibility gradually develops into new forms of socio-economic differentiation and ultimately contributes to the reconfiguration of cultural value.

The framework therefore conceptualises platform-mediated cultural stratification as an emergent socio-technical process produced through the interaction of technological infrastructures, institutional arrangements, economic incentives and social recognition. Rather than attributing cultural inequalities solely to technological systems or market mechanisms, the model emphasises their co-evolution within digitally mediated cultural environments. The theoretical architecture developed in this section provides the conceptual foundation for the empirical analysis presented in the following chapters. The comparative examination of France and Poland enables the PMCS Framework to be explored across two distinct cultural and institutional contexts, allowing an assessment of how common platform dynamics interact with different historical traditions, policy environments and structures of the creative economy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a comparative socio-economic research design to investigate how platformisation reshapes cultural consumption across different institutional environments. Although digital platforms operate through transnational technological infrastructures, their societal consequences remain embedded within nationally differentiated systems of cultural governance, public policy and historical institutional development. Consequently, analysing platform-mediated cultural transformation requires an analytical framework capable of distinguishing between globally shared technological mechanisms and nationally specific institutional contexts.

France and Poland were selected as comparative cases because they represent two institutionally distinct cultural systems operating within a common European regulatory framework. Both countries are subject to the same European Union legislation governing digital markets, copyright, artificial intelligence, competition policy and digital services. At the same time, they differ substantially in the historical evolution of their cultural institutions, models of public cultural governance and trajectories of creative-economy development. France represents one of Europe's most mature systems of state-supported cultural policy, whereas Poland illustrates a post-socialist trajectory characterised by market liberalisation, institutional transformation and rapid digital adaptation.

The comparison follows the logic of a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) (Przeworski and Teune, 1970), which seeks to determine whether comparable socio-economic mechanisms emerge despite substantial institutional differences between the selected cases. Rather than comparing the effectiveness of national cultural policies, the study examines whether platformisation generates convergent processes of algorithmic mediation, visibility allocation, socio-economic differentiation and cultural value formation across distinct institutional settings. The empirical analysis is organised using the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework developed in the preceding section. Accordingly, the framework functions not only as a theoretical model but also as an analytical instrument guiding the interpretation of empirical evidence throughout the comparative study.

3.2. Data sources and operationalisation of the PMCS Framework

The empirical analysis combines multiple sources of evidence through a triangulation strategy, allowing macro-level statistical trends to be interpreted alongside institutional and qualitative evidence. Four complementary categories of empirical material were incorporated into the study:

- secondary statistical datasets
- institutional and policy documents;
- qualitative material derived from the author's doctoral research
- qualitative media discourse analysis

Secondary statistical evidence was obtained primarily from Eurostat, the OECD, UNESCO, the European Commission, UNCTAD, INSEE and Statistics Poland (GUS). The analysis draws upon the most recent datasets and reports available up to December 2025, providing comparable indicators concerning digital participation, cultural consumption, creative industries, employment, digital skills and platform development. Institutional analysis is based on European Union policy documents, national cultural strategies and reports addressing digital transformation and the governance of cultural and creative sectors published within the same reference period. Qualitative evidence includes digital ethnographic observations and comparative analyses of online cultural practices conducted during the author's doctoral research, while media discourse analysis incorporates selected articles published between 2023 and December 2025 in *Le Monde*, *Le Monde diplomatique*, *Res Publica Nowa* and *Tygodnik Powszechny* to contextualise contemporary debates surrounding platformisation, artificial intelligence and cultural transformation.

The temporal scope of the empirical material was intentionally limited to evidence available up to December 2025 in order to ensure the consistency of the comparative analysis and to avoid distortions resulting from subsequent regulatory or technological developments.

4. Empirical analysis, applying the PMCS Framework to France and Poland

The empirical analysis applies the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework to examine how digital transformation reshapes cultural consumption within two institutionally distinct European cultural systems. Rather than comparing France and Poland in terms of the effectiveness of their cultural policies, the analysis investigates whether common platform mechanisms generate comparable socio-economic dynamics despite differences in historical development, institutional organisation and models of cultural governance.

The analytical structure follows the five stages of the PMCS Framework developed in the theoretical section. Each subsection examines a specific dimension of platform-mediated transformation, combining comparative statistical evidence, institutional analysis, qualitative findings and digital ethnography. This sequential approach enables the identification of both shared patterns of platformisation and nationally specific institutional responses, thereby linking macro-level developments with the socio-economic mechanisms through which cultural participation is progressively reorganised.

4.1. Expansion of cultural accessibility

The first stage of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework concerns the expansion of cultural accessibility resulting from the widespread diffusion of digital technologies. From the perspective adopted in this study, accessibility should not be understood merely as a technical indicator describing internet connectivity or digital infrastructure. Rather, it constitutes the structural condition that enables contemporary forms of cultural participation and initiates the broader transformation examined throughout the subsequent stages of the PMCS Framework.

During the last decade, digital technologies have profoundly reshaped the ways in which cultural goods are produced, distributed and consumed across the European Union. Broadband connectivity, mobile internet and platform-based services have substantially reduced geographical and organisational barriers that traditionally constrained participation in cultural life. Streaming platforms, online publishing, virtual museums, digital libraries and user-generated content have progressively transformed cultural participation into an increasingly ubiquitous and networked social practice. Access to culture

is therefore no longer determined primarily by physical proximity to cultural institutions but increasingly by participation within digitally connected environments.

Within this broader European context, both France and Poland demonstrate a high level of digital accessibility despite their markedly different institutional trajectories. France has historically developed one of Europe's strongest systems of publicly supported cultural governance, while Poland's cultural sector has evolved through rapid institutional transformation following the political and economic changes initiated in 1989. Nevertheless, both countries have experienced substantial improvements in internet penetration, broadband availability and digital participation, allowing an increasing proportion of the population to access cultural content through online environments. These developments illustrate the growing convergence of technological conditions across the European digital market despite continuing differences in national cultural-policy traditions.

Statistical evidence obtained from Eurostat, national statistical offices and the European Commission confirms that online cultural participation has become an integral component of everyday digital practices. Streaming audiovisual content, listening to music through subscription platforms, reading digital publications, purchasing tickets online and participating in virtual cultural events are now common forms of cultural engagement in both countries. At the same time, the empirical evidence demonstrates that digital accessibility remains socially differentiated. Educational attainment, digital competences, age and place of residence continue to influence both the intensity and diversity of online cultural participation. Individuals possessing higher levels of education and stronger digital skills participate more actively in platform-based cultural environments, while urban populations generally demonstrate higher levels of digital engagement than rural communities. Consequently, expanded access alone does not eliminate existing socio-economic inequalities but instead creates new conditions within which they are reproduced and transformed.

The comparative indicators presented in Table 7 demonstrate that both France and Poland have reached high levels of digital accessibility, providing favourable structural conditions for participation in digitally mediated cultural activities. Household internet access is almost universal in both countries and remains broadly consistent with the European Union average. However, the comparison also reveals that equal access to digital infrastructure does not necessarily translate into comparable levels of digital competence. While France exceeds the EU average in basic digital skills, Poland continues to lag behind, suggesting that differences in digital literacy may influence the quality and intensity of participation in online cultural environments.

Tabele 7. Selected Indicators of Digital Participation and Cultural Accessibility in France, Poland and the European Union

Indicator	France	Poland	EU-27	Source
Households with internet access at home (2025)	94,4%	96,2%	95,0%	Eurostat; INSEE; GUS
Indyviduals with at least basic digital skills, ages 16–74 (2023)	59,0%	44,3%	55,6%	Eurostat; Digital Decade
Indyviduals purchasing goods or services online in the previous 12 months (2025)	70,8%	69,7%	74,0%	Eurostat; GUS

Source: author's own elaboration based on Eurostat ICT Usage in Households and by Individuals (2025); Eurostat Digital Skills Indicator (2023); European Commission, 2030 Digital Decade Report (2025); INSEE, Internet Access in the European Union (2025); and Statistics Poland (GUS), Information Society in Poland 2025

Note: Values are expressed as percentages and rounded to one decimal place. The latest harmonised or most recent data available up to December 2025 are presented for each indicator. The online purchasing indicator refers to individuals aged 16–74 years.

From the perspective of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework, these findings support the argument that digital accessibility should be regarded as the necessary precondition for cultural participation rather than its final outcome. The expansion of digital infrastructure reduces traditional barriers to access, yet socio-economic differences persist through unequal capacities to navigate digital environments and benefit from platform-based cultural ecosystems. Consequently, accessibility constitutes the starting point of a broader process in which platform mechanisms progressively shape visibility, participation and symbolic recognition.

The empirical evidence presented in Table 7 therefore supports the first analytical proposition of the PMCS Framework and provides the foundation for the subsequent analysis of algorithmic mediation. Once access becomes widespread, the principal analytical question no longer concerns the availability of cultural content but the mechanisms through which platforms organise its recommendation, circulation and visibility.

4.2. Platformisation and algorithmic mediation

The expansion of digital accessibility analysed in the previous section constitutes only the initial stage of platform-mediated cultural transformation. Once access to digital infrastructures becomes widespread, the principal challenge no longer concerns the availability of cultural content itself but the mechanisms through which such content is organised, recommended and distributed. Within contemporary platform ecosystems, cultural participation increasingly depends on algorithmic systems that

mediate interactions between creators, audiences and digital content. Consequently, the analytical focus shifts from access to mediation.

Unlike traditional cultural systems, where visibility was largely shaped by publishers, editors, broadcasters, museums and other institutional gatekeepers, platform environments rely on computational systems that continuously organise cultural exposure according to behavioural data. Recommendation algorithms evaluate users' previous interactions, consumption histories and engagement patterns in order to personalise cultural content and optimise future participation. Algorithmic mediation therefore performs functions that historically belonged to institutional intermediaries while simultaneously introducing new mechanisms of cultural selection.

Table 8. Platformisation and algorithmic mediation of cultural consumption in France and Poland

Dimension	France	Poland	Common platform mechanism	Principal implication
Streaming services	Extensive market penetration	Rapid market expansion	Personalised recommendation systems	Algorithmic discovery replaces institutional programming
Video-sharing platforms	High daily usage	High daily usage	Behavioural ranking algorithms	Visibility depends on engagement metrics
Social media	Mature creator economy	Rapid creator growth	Engagement optimisation	Audience formation increasingly platform-driven
Music platforms	Subscription-based consumption	Growing subscription market	Recommendation algorithms	Musical consumption becomes data-driven
Cultural content circulation	Strong institutional presence	Hybrid institutional-market model	Platform governance	Institutional mediation progressively supplemented by algorithmic mediation

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Eurostat, OECD, European Commission, Reuters Digital News Report, DataReportal and national statistical reports

From an economic perspective, these systems substantially reduce information costs in environments characterised by overwhelming cultural abundance. Rather than searching independently through an almost unlimited volume of available con-

tent, users increasingly encounter culture through personalised recommendations generated by platform infrastructures. At the same time, recommendation systems maximise platform engagement by prioritising content most likely to retain users' attention and stimulate further interaction. Cultural consumption consequently becomes increasingly co-produced through reciprocal interactions between user behaviour and algorithmic prediction.

Although France and Poland differ significantly in the historical organisation of cultural policy, public investment and institutional support for culture, the empirical evidence demonstrates that users in both countries increasingly participate within remarkably similar platform ecosystems. Streaming services, video-sharing platforms, music platforms and social media rely on comparable recommendation architectures irrespective of national institutional contexts. Consequently, everyday cultural participation becomes progressively embedded within transnational systems of algorithmic governance rather than exclusively within nationally organised cultural institutions.

The comparative evidence presented in Table 8 illustrates that the principal convergence between France and Poland does not concern their institutional models of cultural governance but the technological infrastructures through which cultural participation increasingly occurs. Recommendation systems, engagement optimisation and data-driven personalisation operate according to broadly similar principles across both national contexts, despite continuing differences in public cultural policies and institutional traditions.

These findings support the second analytical proposition of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework. Platformisation should therefore be understood not simply as the digitalisation of cultural distribution but as the institutionalisation of algorithmic mediation. Recommendation systems increasingly perform functions traditionally associated with editors, critics, broadcasters and cultural organisations, influencing not only what cultural content is available but also how it is encountered and experienced by users. At the same time, algorithmic mediation establishes the structural conditions for the next stage of the PMCS Framework. As recommendation systems increasingly determine what users encounter within digital environments, competition gradually shifts from the production of cultural content itself towards competition for audience attention. Visibility consequently emerges as a strategic resource whose unequal distribution reshapes symbolic recognition and socio-economic opportunities within contemporary cultural markets.

4.3. Visibility allocation and socio-economic differentiation

The previous section demonstrated that digital platforms increasingly organise cultural participation through algorithmic recommendation systems. However, recommendation alone does not explain the broader transformation of cultural consumption. The socio-economic implications of platformisation emerge when algorithmic mediation begins to distribute visibility unevenly across creators, cultural products and audiences. Under these conditions, visibility itself becomes a strategic resource that determines opportunities for symbolic recognition, audience development and economic sustainability.

Unlike traditional cultural systems, where visibility was largely mediated through institutional selection, platform ecosystems continuously allocate audience attention through behavioural algorithms. Recommendation systems privilege content that maximises engagement, interaction and user retention. As a consequence, creators compete not only through artistic quality but also through their capacity to generate algorithmically rewarded behavioural signals such as viewing time, comments, shares and audience interaction. This transformation fundamentally alters the dynamics of cultural competition. Equal opportunities to publish cultural content no longer imply equal opportunities to become visible. While digital platforms substantially reduce barriers to entry into cultural production, they simultaneously intensify competition for audience attention. Visibility therefore functions as an intermediary mechanism linking accessibility with subsequent socio-economic outcomes.

The empirical evidence indicates that these mechanisms operate in remarkably similar ways across France and Poland. Despite substantial institutional differences, creators in both countries increasingly depend upon global platform infrastructures for audience development, professional recognition and economic sustainability. Recommendation systems employed by streaming platforms and social media apply comparable principles of ranking and behavioural optimisation irrespective of national cultural traditions.

Table 9. Socio-economic consequences of platform-mediated cultural consumption

PMCS stage	Principal transformation	Socio-economic consequence
Expansion of accessibility	Lower barriers to participation	Growth in digital cultural participation
Algorithmic mediation	Recommendation systems organise visibility	Declining importance of traditional gatekeepers

PMCS stage	Principal transformation	Socio-economic consequence
Visibility allocation	Attention becomes concentrated	Unequal distribution of symbolic recognition
Socio-economic differentiation	Visibility converted into economic value	Income concentration and creative precarity
Reconfiguration of cultural value	Platform metrics shape legitimacy	Hybrid systems of symbolic and economic valuation

Source: author’s own elaboration based on Eurostat (2025); OECD (2025); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024); European Commission (2025); World Economic Forum (2025); INSEE (2025); Statistics Poland (GUS) (2025); and the author’s qualitative research, including digital ethnography and media discourse analysis

The comparative findings presented in Table 9 demonstrate that platformisation simultaneously expands opportunities for cultural participation while concentrating symbolic and economic rewards. The relationship between visibility and economic value becomes increasingly direct as audience attention is transformed into advertising revenues, subscriptions, sponsorship agreements and professional opportunities. Consequently, visibility acquires a dual function, operating both as symbolic capital and as a resource that facilitates economic accumulation.

These observations support the central proposition of the PMCS Framework that platformisation restructures cultural participation through cumulative processes rather than isolated technological innovations. Accessibility enables participation, algorithmic mediation organises exposure, visibility determines recognition and socio-economic differentiation shapes opportunities for long-term sustainability within cultural and creative sectors. Importantly, the findings do not suggest that artistic quality has become irrelevant. Rather, they indicate that aesthetic evaluation increasingly coexists with computational forms of assessment based on engagement metrics and behavioural performance. Cultural legitimacy therefore emerges through hybrid systems combining institutional recognition, audience participation and algorithmic evaluation.

The empirical analysis demonstrates that the principal transformation associated with platformisation concerns not merely the democratisation of access but the redistribution of visibility within digitally mediated cultural environments. Consequently, the challenge facing contemporary cultural policy extends beyond ensuring participation in culture towards addressing the governance of algorithmic visibility, symbolic recognition and platform accountability.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions of the PMCS Framework

The comparative analysis of France and Poland demonstrates that the transformation of cultural participation cannot be adequately explained either by classical theories of cultural democratisation or by economic interpretations focused exclusively on the expansion of digital markets. Instead, the empirical findings indicate that platformisation has fundamentally reconfigured the mechanisms through which cultural value, visibility and participation are organised within contemporary digital environments. The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the development and empirical application of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework. Rather than conceptualising digital transformation as a process that simply expands cultural participation, the framework demonstrates that platformisation simultaneously produces new forms of socio-economic differentiation. Accessibility, algorithmic mediation, visibility allocation and the reconfiguration of cultural value should therefore be understood as interconnected stages of a cumulative process rather than as independent technological developments.

This perspective extends Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital by demonstrating that symbolic recognition increasingly depends not only on institutional legitimacy but also on computational systems governing digital visibility. While cultural institutions continue to shape artistic recognition, recommendation algorithms have emerged as additional intermediaries influencing the circulation, discoverability and economic valorisation of cultural production. Consequently, symbolic capital is increasingly generated through the interaction between institutional evaluation, audience engagement and algorithmic recommendation.

The findings also contribute to contemporary research on platformisation by integrating sociological, communication and cultural-economic perspectives within a single analytical framework. Previous studies have extensively examined platform governance, algorithmic recommendation and platform capitalism. However, these approaches have generally addressed technological infrastructures, media systems or economic models separately. The PMCS Framework contributes by explaining how these dimensions interact to reshape cultural participation and generate new patterns of inequality within platform-mediated cultural ecosystems.

Importantly, the comparative evidence indicates that these transformations transcend national institutional differences. Despite the distinct historical trajectories of

cultural policy in France and Poland, platform infrastructures produce increasingly similar mechanisms of cultural mediation. This suggests that global digital platforms function as transnational institutional environments that progressively standardise the conditions under which cultural participation occurs, while national policies continue to influence the broader cultural context. The study therefore argues that contemporary inequalities within cultural participation cannot be interpreted solely through differences in access to culture. Instead, they increasingly emerge through unequal opportunities to obtain visibility, accumulate symbolic recognition and convert digital attention into sustainable cultural and economic capital. In this sense, platformisation does not replace traditional mechanisms of cultural stratification but restructures and amplifies them within digitally mediated environments.

5.2. Implications for cultural policy and platform governance

The findings presented in this study have important implications for both cultural policy and the governance of digital platforms. While public debates frequently emphasise the democratising potential of digital technologies, the empirical evidence suggests that expanding access to digital infrastructures alone is insufficient to ensure equitable participation in contemporary cultural ecosystems. As cultural production and consumption become increasingly mediated by platform architectures, the governance of algorithmic visibility emerges as a critical dimension of cultural policy.

Traditional cultural policies have primarily focused on supporting artistic production, preserving cultural heritage and expanding public access to cultural institutions. These objectives remain essential; however, they no longer fully address the structural conditions under which culture circulates in digitally mediated environments. The findings indicate that recommendation algorithms, platform ranking systems and data-driven personalisation increasingly influence which cultural products reach audiences, how symbolic recognition is distributed and which creators are able to develop sustainable professional careers.

Consequently, future cultural policies should not only promote access to digital technologies but also strengthen the conditions that enable fair visibility and diversity within platform ecosystems. This includes improving digital competencies among creators and audiences, enhancing transparency regarding algorithmic recommendation systems and encouraging greater accountability among platform operators. Such measures are particularly relevant for cultural and creative sectors, where economic sustainability often depends upon maintaining long-term

audience engagement and public recognition. The comparative analysis further demonstrates that these challenges are shared across different national contexts. Although France possesses a long-established tradition of state support for culture and Poland has undergone a distinct post-socialist transformation, both countries increasingly operate within common transnational platform infrastructures. National cultural policies therefore face similar constraints arising from the growing influence of global digital intermediaries whose governance extends beyond national regulatory frameworks.

These observations also reinforce current European policy initiatives concerning digital governance. Legislative frameworks such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Artificial Intelligence Act represent important steps towards increasing platform transparency, accountability and user protection. Nevertheless, the present findings suggest that future regulatory debates should place greater emphasis on the cultural consequences of algorithmic mediation, particularly regarding the distribution of visibility, symbolic recognition and opportunities for participation within digital cultural markets. Rather than viewing digital platforms solely as technological infrastructures or commercial enterprises, this study argues that they increasingly function as cultural institutions that shape contemporary systems of recognition, participation and value formation. Understanding platforms in this broader institutional sense expands the analytical scope of cultural policy by recognising that the governance of digital infrastructures has become inseparable from the governance of culture itself.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite its theoretical and empirical contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the comparative analysis focuses exclusively on France and Poland. Although these countries represent two distinct institutional models of cultural development within the European Union, the findings cannot be automatically generalised to other cultural, political or economic contexts. Future comparative studies incorporating additional European and non-European countries would provide a broader understanding of how platformisation interacts with diverse institutional environments.

Second, the research adopts a qualitative and interpretative methodological approach, combining digital ethnography, comparative document analysis, media di-

scourse analysis and secondary statistical sources. This design enables an in-depth examination of the mechanisms through which platformisation reshapes cultural participation but does not allow for the measurement of causal relationships between algorithmic governance and socio-economic outcomes. Future research could therefore complement the present findings through longitudinal quantitative analyses, large-scale surveys or computational studies examining patterns of visibility and recommendation across digital platforms.

A further limitation concerns the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies. Recommendation systems, generative artificial intelligence and platform governance continue to develop at a pace that frequently exceeds the capacity of academic research to capture their long-term consequences. Consequently, the empirical evidence presented in this article should be understood as reflecting the state of digital cultural ecosystems up to December 2025, while recognising that future technological developments may introduce new mechanisms influencing cultural participation and value creation.

The Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework nevertheless provides a flexible analytical model that can be further developed and empirically tested across different cultural sectors, digital platforms and geographical contexts. Future research may apply the framework to specific creative industries, including music, film, publishing, design, architecture, fashion and digital visual culture, where algorithmic mediation increasingly shapes professional opportunities and symbolic recognition. Moreover, the growing integration of generative artificial intelligence into cultural production raises new questions regarding authorship, creativity, originality and the governance of cultural value. Investigating how AI-generated content interacts with recommendation systems and platform infrastructures represents a particularly promising avenue for extending the PMCS Framework. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving relationships between technological innovation, cultural production and socio-economic inequality within contemporary digital societies.

Ultimately, this study should be regarded as an initial step towards a broader theoretical agenda examining the social consequences of platform-mediated cultural transformation. As digital platforms continue to redefine the conditions under which culture is created, distributed and recognised, further interdisciplinary research will be essential for understanding the evolving dynamics of participation, visibility and cultural stratification.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how platformisation reshapes cultural participation through the interaction between digital accessibility, algorithmic mediation and evolving mechanisms of cultural value creation. By comparing France and Poland, the analysis demonstrated that despite their distinct institutional traditions and cultural policy models, both countries are increasingly embedded within common digital platform ecosystems that influence the production, circulation and consumption of culture in similar ways.

The empirical findings indicate that the democratisation of access to digital technologies does not necessarily produce a corresponding democratisation of cultural opportunities. While digital infrastructures substantially reduce barriers to participation, platform architectures simultaneously reorganise the distribution of visibility, symbolic recognition and economic opportunities. Consequently, contemporary inequalities in cultural participation increasingly emerge not from restricted access to cultural content but from unequal opportunities to achieve algorithmically mediated visibility within digital environments.

The principal contribution of this article is the development and empirical application of the Platform-Mediated Cultural Stratification (PMCS) Framework. The framework conceptualises platformisation as a cumulative socio-technical process composed of five interrelated stages: the expansion of cultural accessibility, algorithmic mediation, visibility allocation, socio-economic differentiation and the re-configuration of cultural value. Rather than interpreting these processes as isolated technological developments, the PMCS Framework demonstrates how they collectively reshape the mechanisms through which symbolic recognition and economic value are produced within contemporary cultural ecosystems.

The comparative perspective adopted in this study further demonstrates that platformisation should be understood as a transnational phenomenon that increasingly transcends national institutional boundaries. Although France and Poland differ considerably in the historical organisation of their cultural sectors, both experience similar structural transformations resulting from the growing influence of global platform infrastructures. This finding suggests that the governance of digital platforms has become an increasingly significant factor in shaping cultural participation across Europe, complementing rather than replacing traditional national cultural policies.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to ongoing debates in sociology, communication studies and cultural economics by integrating insights from

theories of cultural capital, platform governance and the attention economy within a unified analytical framework. In doing so, it extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that algorithmic systems have become central intermediaries in the production of symbolic value and cultural legitimacy. The PMCS Framework therefore offers a conceptual bridge between classical theories of cultural stratification and contemporary analyses of digitally mediated societies.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of approaching digital transformation not merely as a technological process but as a broader social and institutional reconfiguration of cultural life. As platform ecosystems continue to evolve through advances in artificial intelligence, datafication and automated recommendation systems, understanding the mechanisms that govern visibility, participation and cultural recognition will become increasingly important for researchers, policymakers and cultural institutions alike. The PMCS Framework provides one possible foundation for future interdisciplinary research seeking to explain how digital infrastructures continue to transform the relationship between culture, technology and social inequality.

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Appendix A. Qualitative Media Corpus

The qualitative media corpus analysed in this study comprised selected editorials, feature articles and analytical publications published between 2023 and December 2025 in:

Le Monde

Le Monde diplomatique

Res Publica Nowa

Tygodnik Powszechny

The corpus was selected using purposive sampling and included publications addressing platformisation, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, cultural policy and the evolution of cultural participation in France and Poland.

