



Epistemic Gatekeepers as the Fourth Estate

Reining in Media's Unchecked Epistemic Power

Peter Kahl; independent researcher; first published 'free-range' 27 July 2025 on Substack

Abstract

In this thesis, I reconceptualise contemporary media institutions as constitutional epistemic actors whose governance roles parallel traditional legislative, executive, and judicial state functions. Drawing upon my original theoretical frameworks—Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT) and fiduciary epistemology—and canonical scholarship (Foucault, Habermas, Gramsci, Chomsky/Herman), I demonstrate how media entities exercise significant epistemic control, shaping democratic legitimacy, historical narratives, and societal discourse. Through empirical case studies, I illustrate practices of epistemic clientelism and algorithmic gatekeeping, highlighting constitutional concerns such as democratic accountability deficits and epistemic injustice. In response, I propose a robust fiduciary-epistemic accountability framework, outlining fiduciary duties (transparency, epistemic fairness, accountability) and practical institutional mechanisms. Ultimately, I argue that explicit constitutional recognition and fiduciary regulation of epistemic gatekeepers is crucial for democratic governance, epistemic justice, and historical integrity. History is written by those who control epistemic gatekeeping; safeguarding democratic legitimacy thus demands explicit fiduciary governance of epistemic power.

Keywords

epistemic gatekeeping, epistemic clientelism, fiduciary epistemology, constitutional theory, constitutional law theory, separation of powers, democratic governance theory, media accountability, epistemic justice, democratic legitimacy, fiduciary governance, algorithmic accountability, media regulation, epistemic pluralism, epistemic autonomy, constitutional reform, public sphere theory, historical narratives



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1. Introduction

1.1 Historical Foundations

The concept of the press as a ‘fourth estate’ is commonly attributed to Edmund Burke, who, according to Thomas Carlyle in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (1841), famously described the parliamentary reporters’ gallery in 1787 as a distinct and influential force, separate from yet capable of scrutinising the traditional branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial {Carlyle 1841}. Burke’s characterisation positioned media as external watchdogs, tasked with monitoring political power and holding state institutions accountable through independent reporting and critique.

However, historical evidence indicates that Burke’s explicit use of this phrase remains unverified, suggesting that Carlyle might have mistakenly attributed to Burke a concept articulated by other authors. According to Pascal Tréguer’s detailed historical analysis, earlier usages of ‘the fourth estate’ are traceable to Henry Fielding in *The Covent-Garden Journal* (1752), who employed the term to designate ‘the Mob’, and subsequently to Thomas Macaulay in his 1828 essay, where he described the press as constituting ‘a fourth estate of the realm’, influential enough to rival traditional constitutional powers {Tréguer 2016}. Additionally, William Hazlitt applied the term in 1821 to describe journalist William Cobbett’s powerful influence on political discourse {Tréguer 2016}.

This historical clarification significantly enriches our understanding of the press’s evolving epistemic and constitutional role. Historically, the media were perceived as passive observers, impartially reflecting societal and political realities rather than actively shaping or governing them. Yet, even these earlier accounts implicitly acknowledged media’s potential epistemic influence on democratic discourse and governance.

In contrast, my scholarship explicitly reconceptualises media institutions as active epistemic gatekeepers whose contemporary epistemic governance power surpasses historical characterisations. Unlike traditional perspectives offered by Carlyle, Burke, and Macaulay, I argue that contemporary media institutions no longer merely observe democratic governance but engage in epistemic governance by selecting, framing, and controlling public narratives and knowledge. Media institutions thus shape democratic legitimacy, societal perceptions, and political outcomes.

My reconceptualisation explicitly positions contemporary media as epistemic constitutional actors whose influential role necessitates explicit constitutional recognition and fiduciary accountability. This theoretical departure challenges traditional portrayals of media as neutral arbiters of truth and transparency, emphasising instead their active epistemic role in shaping democratic discourse. Indeed, history is written by those who control epistemic gatekeeping; the present, similarly, is shaped by those who govern epistemic power.

1.2 Contemporary Significance

Building upon these historical insights, I argue that contemporary media institutions function as epistemic gatekeepers whose governance influence parallels traditional constitutional state organs. Scholars such as Yochai Benkler and Chomsky and Herman previously recognised media’s significant epistemic impact on democratic discourse, public perceptions, and governance outcomes {Benkler 2006; Chomsky and Herman 2008}. Benkler emphasises media’s role in shaping democratic legitimacy perceptions, while Chomsky and Herman’s ‘propaganda model’ critically demonstrates media’s structural alignment with elite interests, marginalising dissent and implicitly shaping democratic outcomes.

Yet, my scholarly contribution diverges from prior analyses by integrating media's epistemic gatekeeping role into constitutional and fiduciary governance frameworks. Whereas existing scholarship typically addresses media's epistemic role through sociological or critical lenses, I propose constitutional theory and fiduciary epistemology as essential frameworks necessary for addressing media's democratic influence and accountability.

Contemporary media engage constitutional considerations because their epistemic governance profoundly shapes democratic legitimacy, electoral outcomes, policy deliberation, and societal narratives. Explicit examples such as media framing during the Brexit referendum, electoral debates, or the COVID-19 pandemic clearly illustrate how epistemic gatekeepers directly shape public perceptions and democratic outcomes.

Thus, recognising media institutions explicitly as constitutional epistemic actors is crucial for safeguarding democratic legitimacy, accountability, and epistemic justice. Without explicit fiduciary-epistemic governance frameworks, media's epistemic gatekeeping remains unchecked, implicitly perpetuating epistemic injustices, democratic legitimacy deficits, and historical distortions. Indeed, history and the present alike are shaped by those who control epistemic governance, highlighting the explicit democratic urgency of my fiduciary-epistemic accountability proposals.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

Given the historical context and contemporary significance established above, I now articulate the core research questions and practical objectives guiding this inquiry. Central to my argument is the recognition that contemporary media institutions, through their epistemic gatekeeping practices, occupy a constitutional role analogous to traditional organs of the state. Such recognition demands rigorous analysis across constitutional, epistemic, and fiduciary dimensions.

This thesis addresses three primary research questions:

1. **In what specific ways do contemporary media gatekeepers exercise quasi-state epistemic governance?**

Here, I aim to demonstrate how media institutions perform governance roles typically associated with constitutional organs—legislative (agenda-setting), executive (enforcing epistemic boundaries), and judicial (adjudicating legitimacy of discourse). Answering this question has direct implications for constitutional theory, particularly concerning separation of powers and institutional accountability.

2. **How can constitutional theory adequately recognise and incorporate the epistemic power wielded by media institutions?**

This theoretical objective addresses a critical gap in existing constitutional theory, which currently fails to sufficiently acknowledge or regulate media's epistemic governance power. Clarifying this issue contributes directly to constitutional scholarship and highlights the urgency of constitutional reforms responsive to epistemic governance challenges.

3. **What fiduciary and epistemic obligations should govern media institutions to ensure alignment with democratic legitimacy and epistemic justice?**

Practically, I aim to develop and propose fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks that specify clear duties of transparency, epistemic fairness, and democratic accountability for media entities. This objective seeks not only theoretical clarity but also concrete policy relevance, proposing explicit constitutional amendments or statutory frameworks to safeguard democratic governance from epistemic abuses.

Collectively, these research questions and objectives hold practical democratic and governance implications. By linking epistemic gatekeeping practices to constitutional accountability and fiduciary obligations, this research

aims to address current democratic legitimacy crises, epistemic injustices, and systemic accountability deficits. Thus, my scholarship seeks not only theoretical advancement but also practical impact, proposing rigorous, actionable constitutional and legislative solutions to contemporary epistemic governance challenges.

1.4 Chapter Overview and Methodology

To systematically address the research questions outlined above, I have structured this thesis into seven interconnected chapters, each logically and thematically developing the constitutional, epistemic, and fiduciary dimensions central to my argument. My interdisciplinary approach primarily targets constitutional scholars, political theorists, epistemologists, policymakers, and governance practitioners. The work aims to resonate broadly across disciplines concerned with democratic legitimacy, epistemic justice, and institutional accountability.

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical foundations essential to my argument. Here, I synthesise my prior theoretical contributions—particularly Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT) (2025)—with canonical critical theories. I integrate Michel Foucault’s concept of power-knowledge to elucidate media’s active role in constructing truth regimes, Habermas’s public sphere theory to evaluate democratic implications of media epistemic control, Gramsci’s cultural hegemony theory to examine ideological conformity promoted by media, and Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model to analyse institutionalised epistemic bias. Each of these theoretical perspectives concretely supports my constitutional and epistemic analysis, offering critical lenses through which media’s epistemic gatekeeping can be rigorously examined.

In **Chapter 3**, I analyse how contemporary media institutions function as constitutional epistemic actors. Here, I systematically illustrate media practices analogous to legislative, executive, and judicial functions, clarifying their constitutional implications concerning separation of powers, democratic accountability, and fiduciary responsibilities.

Chapter 4 strengthens my theoretical argument through empirical analysis. Drawing upon my personal experiences with institutional epistemic gatekeeping, and documented cases of algorithmic suppression (such as restricted visibility of scholarly works online), I concretely illustrate how epistemic clientelism operates within contemporary media contexts. These examples methodologically reinforce my theoretical frameworks, demonstrating the practical urgency of constitutional epistemic accountability.

In **Chapter 5**, I transition from critical analysis to normative recommendations. Here, I advocate constitutional recognition of media’s epistemic role and propose detailed fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks. My normative proposals include concrete institutional mechanisms such as public epistemic audits, parliamentary oversight committees, and regulatory transparency provisions, designed to align media’s epistemic governance power with democratic legitimacy.

Chapter 6 engages with potential critiques and counterarguments, addressing concerns about media freedom, institutional independence, and practical implementation barriers. My responses emphasise fiduciary-epistemic governance as compatible with, rather than restrictive of, media independence, carefully balancing democratic accountability with epistemic autonomy.

Finally, in **Chapter 7**, I synthesise the findings and proposals of this thesis, outlining the implications for constitutional theory, democratic governance, and epistemic justice. I highlight future research avenues and conclude with reflections on the transformative potential of explicit fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks for addressing contemporary democratic legitimacy crises.

Methodologically, this thesis combines doctrinal constitutional analysis, critical epistemic theory, and empirical case studies. My interdisciplinary synthesis ensures methodological coherence and depth, aligning theoretical and practical dimensions of epistemic governance. Thus, my methodological approach not only provides analytical clarity but also reinforces the theoretical robustness and practical relevance of my constitutional and fiduciary accountability proposals.

1.5 Significance, Contribution, and Novelty

This thesis advances constitutional theory, epistemic governance, democratic legitimacy, and institutional accountability by systematically reconceptualising contemporary media institutions as constitutional epistemic gatekeepers. Whereas prior scholarship—Burke, Carlyle, Benkler, Chomsky / Herman—predominantly characterised media as external watchdogs or elite-influenced observers, my research positions media institutions as active constitutional actors whose epistemic governance profoundly shapes democratic discourse, public trust, and historical narratives.

My original scholarly contribution integrates previously disconnected theoretical frameworks: epistemic clientelism theory (Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT), 2025), fiduciary epistemology, and canonical critical theories (Foucault’s power-knowledge, Habermas’s public sphere, Gramsci’s cultural hegemony, Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model). By synthesising these diverse perspectives, I develop a novel theoretical foundation to critically analyse media’s constitutional epistemic influence, significantly extending current constitutional and democratic governance scholarship.

Furthermore, my fiduciary-epistemic accountability framework represents practical innovation. Unlike existing literature—typically limited to descriptive critiques or broad ethical guidelines—my work proposes robust fiduciary accountability mechanisms. These mechanisms include transparent fiduciary obligations, independent epistemic oversight institutions, public epistemic audits, and statutory provisions for algorithmic transparency and editorial accountability. By addressing epistemic clientelism, democratic accountability deficits, and institutional opacity, my proposed reforms offer concrete, actionable steps towards democratic renewal.

Ultimately, this thesis bridges constitutional theory, epistemic justice, and fiduciary governance, filling a critical gap by situating media’s epistemic power within democratic constitutional frameworks. My interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis and practical recommendations provide novel scholarly insights and actionable legislative proposals, significantly enhancing democratic accountability, epistemic fairness, and public trust.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

In this chapter, I establish the theoretical foundations underpinning my reconceptualisation of contemporary media institutions as constitutional epistemic actors. Drawing from interdisciplinary critical scholarship, I systematically integrate Michel Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge and governmentality, Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere theory, Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, and Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model. Additionally, I build upon my own pivotal theoretical frameworks—Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT) and fiduciary epistemology—to provide a rigorous analysis of media’s epistemic governance. This theoretical synthesis reveals how media institutions shape societal truths, democratic legitimacy, and ideological consent, reinforcing epistemic clientelism. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives support my constitutional argument that fiduciary accountability frameworks are necessary to regulate media’s epistemic governance, safeguard epistemic pluralism, and enhance democratic legitimacy.

2.1 Epistemic Clientelism and Institutional Gatekeeping

To rigorously establish the theoretical foundation for my constitutional argument, I first revisit my earlier work on epistemic governance—particularly Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT) (2025). In ECT, I proposed a systematic analysis of institutional gatekeeping, defining epistemic clientelism as a structural practice through which institutions—such as academic publishers, scholarly journals, and media organisations—selectively disseminate, legitimise, or marginalise knowledge. This process is inherently political, as institutions actively privilege specific epistemic frameworks while excluding others, thereby shaping societal knowledge production and democratic discourse.

I argued in ECT that epistemic clientelism operates similarly to traditional political clientelism, where institutional ‘patrons’ grant epistemic visibility, credibility, and legitimacy selectively to ‘clients’ who conform ideologically or epistemically, while systematically marginalising dissenting voices. Epistemic clientelism thus effectively reinforces existing power structures by excluding perspectives that challenge institutionalised orthodoxy.

This theoretical framework aligns closely with Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s seminal propaganda model, which analyses institutional media practices as mechanisms that systematically filter out critical or dissenting knowledge, privileging narratives favourable to elite interests {Chomsky and Herman 2008}. Similarly, Antonio Gramsci’s cultural hegemony theory provides complementary insights into how epistemic consent is produced through subtle, institutionally embedded mechanisms of ideological conformity and marginalisation {Gramsci 1971}. By integrating these canonical frameworks, I enrich the explanatory power of my epistemic clientelism theory, demonstrating clearly how epistemic governance reinforces ideological conformity and maintains elite dominance within institutional contexts.

In the media context specifically, epistemic clientelism manifests in editorial practices, narrative framing, and algorithmic content control, systematically excluding or marginalising dissenting or minority perspectives in favour of established narratives and elite interests. As such, media institutions actively participate in epistemic governance, shaping democratic legitimacy and political outcomes. This epistemic power, I argue, demands explicit recognition within constitutional theory, precisely because it profoundly influences democratic discourse, public knowledge, and political legitimacy.

Thus, my epistemic clientelism theory provides a robust analytical framework that identifies media’s epistemic gatekeeping as an institutional power structure requiring rigorous constitutional and fiduciary accountability. In subsequent sections of this chapter, I will further integrate canonical theories—particularly Foucault’s power-knowledge, Habermas’s public sphere, and fiduciary epistemology—to strengthen the theoretical foundation of my constitutional argument, demonstrating the constitutional relevance and urgency of regulating media’s epistemic governance practices.

2.2 Fiduciary Epistemology

Building upon my critique of epistemic clientelism, I now introduce fiduciary epistemology as an essential conceptual framework for addressing the constitutional implications of media gatekeeping. Fiduciary epistemology, as I have developed in previous work—notably *Against the Peer Review Empire* (2025)—positions institutions exercising significant epistemic power as fiduciaries, accountable to society through clear duties of transparency, loyalty, fairness, and epistemic integrity.

Fiduciary obligations traditionally apply to those entrusted with discretionary power over the interests of others. Directors, trustees, and public officials exemplify fiduciary roles, each bearing explicit duties aimed at

preventing abuses of authority. Extending this fiduciary framework into epistemology provides a robust mechanism to hold epistemic institutions accountable for their discretionary control over societal knowledge production. Media entities, by exercising epistemic governance—determining which knowledge enters public discourse and shaping collective understanding—hold discretionary power comparable to traditional fiduciaries.

This fiduciary epistemology framework is conceptually aligned with constitutional principles of democratic accountability and legitimacy. Media institutions, as epistemic fiduciaries, must ensure transparency in editorial decision-making, accountability for epistemic biases, and fairness in the representation of diverse viewpoints. Fiduciary obligations thus provide explicit standards to regulate media's epistemic influence, addressing democratic deficits and epistemic injustices arising from opaque or arbitrary epistemic governance practices.

Integrating fiduciary epistemology differentiates my approach from existing media scholarship. While critical scholars, such as Chomsky and Herman, extensively critique media practices, their analyses typically stop short of articulating explicit governance obligations to ensure accountability. My fiduciary epistemology approach innovatively bridges this gap, offering constitutional and legislative frameworks that concretely define and enforce epistemic responsibilities.

2.3 Foucault: Power-Knowledge and Governmentality

Having established the theoretical significance of fiduciary epistemology, I now turn to Michel Foucault's critical frameworks of power-knowledge and governmentality to deepen my analysis of media institutions as epistemic constitutional actors.

Foucault famously articulated the inseparable relationship between power and knowledge, arguing that knowledge is not merely a neutral representation of reality, but actively shapes and sustains social power structures {Foucault 1980}. According to Foucault, what societies regard as 'truth' is produced and maintained by specific institutional practices and discursive frameworks, which he terms 'regimes of truth'. These truth regimes systematically determine what can be said, by whom, and under what conditions, thus governing not just knowledge production, but societal behaviour and political legitimacy itself.

I argue that contemporary media institutions serve as critical producers and guardians of these truth regimes. Through their epistemic gatekeeping practices—editorial selection, framing narratives, algorithmic content control—media entities actively construct and reinforce specific 'truths', epistemically shaping public understanding of democratic governance, political legitimacy, and social reality. This epistemic control directly influences public perception, political debate, and democratic outcomes, profoundly affecting constitutional governance.

Closely related is Foucault's notion of 'governmentality', which describes how societies are governed through techniques and practices of managing populations, often through epistemic and discursive means rather than overt coercion {Foucault 1991}. In this context, media gatekeeping operates as a technique of governmentality, exercising power through subtle management of public discourse, framing societal problems, and defining acceptable political solutions. Rather than direct control, media institutions engage in epistemic governance by shaping conceptual frameworks, public debates, and collective values—thereby governing society through epistemic influence.

Integrating Foucault's insights reinforces my argument for constitutional recognition of media's epistemic governance role. Recognising media as active participants in governmentality, responsible for producing societal truth regimes, underscores the necessity of explicit fiduciary accountability frameworks to ensure democratic transparency and epistemic fairness.

2.4 Habermas: Public Sphere Theory

Building further upon Foucault's power-knowledge framework, I now integrate Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere into my theoretical foundation. Habermas defines the public sphere as an ideal democratic space where individuals engage freely in rational-critical discourse, openly deliberating on matters of common societal concern without coercion or distortion {Habermas 1989}. Central to Habermas's theory is the notion that a healthy democratic society depends critically upon open, inclusive, and transparent public discourse, facilitated by institutions that prioritise epistemic fairness and democratic legitimacy.

Applying Habermas to contemporary media institutions, I argue that media gatekeeping practices profoundly influence the integrity and inclusivity of the public sphere. When media institutions systematically privilege particular narratives, marginalise dissent, or limit epistemic plurality through selective framing and content moderation, they actively distort public deliberation, undermining democratic legitimacy and accountability. Thus, media institutions directly shape the quality of democratic discourse by determining which voices, viewpoints, and knowledge enter public consciousness, potentially compromising the epistemic fairness Habermas identifies as essential for democratic governance.

Habermas's theory clearly highlights the democratic implications of media's epistemic power. By controlling access to and participation within the public sphere, contemporary media effectively function as constitutional gatekeepers, influencing democratic legitimacy through epistemic control. This underscores my argument for explicit constitutional and fiduciary accountability frameworks, designed specifically to safeguard public discourse from media-driven epistemic distortion.

Moreover, integrating Habermas differentiates my scholarship from existing critical media studies. While scholars like Chomsky and Herman extensively critique media's distortionary practices, their analyses typically lack explicit normative accountability mechanisms to safeguard the public sphere. My fiduciary-epistemic framework addresses this limitation, proposing governance obligations to protect democratic legitimacy and epistemic integrity within media institutions.

2.5 Gramsci: Cultural Hegemony

Having established the relevance of Habermas's public sphere theory, I now integrate Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony into my theoretical analysis of contemporary media institutions. Gramsci theorised cultural hegemony as the process by which dominant groups in society maintain power not through overt force, but by securing consent through the widespread acceptance and internalisation of particular ideologies, values, and beliefs as natural, inevitable, and universal {Gramsci 1971}. According to Gramsci, institutions such as media, education, and religious organisations play critical roles in disseminating and legitimising hegemonic ideologies, subtly shaping public consciousness and political consent.

Applying Gramsci's concept to contemporary media practices, I argue that media institutions actively participate in constructing and reinforcing ideological consent by systematically privileging certain epistemic frameworks and marginalising or excluding dissenting perspectives. Through practices such as selective narrative framing, editorial gatekeeping, and algorithmic content curation, media entities perpetuate dominant ideologies—often aligned with political, economic, or social elite interests—thus exercising significant epistemic control over democratic discourse and societal values.

Crucially, this ideological control is achieved through subtle, epistemic means rather than overt coercion, effectively reinforcing hegemonic power structures by limiting epistemic plurality and silencing alternative viewpoints. This process aligns directly with my earlier analysis of epistemic clientelism and fiduciary

epistemology, underscoring media institutions' implicit fiduciary obligations to ensure epistemic fairness and transparency within democratic societies.

Recognising media's role in cultural hegemony supports my constitutional argument. Given media's powerful influence on ideological consent, democratic legitimacy, and public discourse, explicit constitutional and fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks are essential to safeguard democratic pluralism and epistemic justice. Such frameworks would counteract epistemic marginalisation, ensuring media's epistemic governance aligns with principles of transparency, fairness, and democratic legitimacy.

2.6 Chomsky and Herman: The Propaganda Model

To complete my theoretical foundation, I integrate Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's influential 'propaganda model', which provides a rigorous structural analysis of how media institutions systematically serve elite interests through institutionalised epistemic filtering {Chomsky and Herman 2008}. According to Chomsky and Herman, mainstream media content is shaped predominantly by institutional incentives, corporate ownership structures, advertising pressures, sourcing biases, and prevailing political and ideological interests. Collectively, these structural factors produce systemic biases, filtering out critical, dissenting, or disruptive perspectives, thereby reinforcing elite dominance and limiting democratic epistemic pluralism.

Chomsky and Herman's model directly reinforces my earlier analysis of epistemic clientelism, illustrating concretely how institutional epistemic gatekeeping operates to marginalise dissenting knowledge in favour of epistemic conformity. Media institutions, according to the propaganda model, not only perpetuate elite ideologies but actively exclude alternative viewpoints through structural mechanisms, thus profoundly influencing democratic discourse and societal understanding.

Integrating Chomsky and Herman's insights strengthens my constitutional argument by clarifying the structural nature of media's epistemic governance. Unlike traditional watchdog conceptualisations, the propaganda model highlights media's systemic and institutionalised biases, underscoring the necessity of explicit fiduciary-epistemic governance frameworks to counteract epistemic clientelism and ensure democratic accountability.

My scholarship differentiates itself from Chomsky and Herman's original critique by advancing concrete fiduciary-epistemic proposals designed to regulate media's epistemic influence constitutionally and legislatively. While Chomsky and Herman primarily identify media's structural biases and their impacts on democratic discourse, my approach goes further by proposing explicit fiduciary obligations and accountability mechanisms to actively safeguard epistemic fairness, transparency, and democratic legitimacy.

Thus, integrating the propaganda model completes my theoretical foundation, demonstrating clearly how epistemic clientelism, fiduciary epistemology, power-knowledge frameworks, public sphere theory, cultural hegemony, and structural media critiques collectively support my constitutional analysis and normative proposals for regulating contemporary media's epistemic governance.

Having now fully articulated the theoretical and conceptual foundations of my argument, Chapter 3 will systematically analyse contemporary media institutions as epistemic constitutional actors, illustrating their governance roles analogous to traditional state organs, and addressing their constitutional and fiduciary implications.

3. Media's Constitutional Role as Epistemic Actors

In this chapter, I analyse contemporary media institutions as constitutional epistemic actors, systematically demonstrating how their epistemic governance functions parallel the traditional legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the state. I argue that media entities actively shape political agendas (legislative function), enforce epistemic boundaries within democratic discourse (executive function), and adjudicate the legitimacy of competing narratives (judicial function). Through this constitutional analogy, I identify significant implications, including separation-of-powers concerns, democratic accountability deficits, and neglected fiduciary obligations. By illustrating media's profound epistemic influence on democratic legitimacy and political outcomes, this analysis further substantiates the urgency of explicitly recognising and regulating media institutions within constitutional and fiduciary accountability frameworks.

3.1 Analogy to State Organs

Having clearly established my theoretical framework in the previous chapters, I now analyse contemporary media institutions through the lens of constitutional theory, demonstrating how their epistemic gatekeeping practices parallel the traditional functions of state organs—legislative, executive, and judicial.

Legislative Function: Framing Political Agendas

Media institutions perform a function closely analogous to legislative bodies by determining which political issues become salient within public discourse. By setting agendas and prioritising certain policy issues over others, media entities actively shape legislative attention, public debate, and political priorities. This epistemic agenda-setting resembles the legislative function of parliaments in establishing the political agenda.

For example, media framing significantly influences public perceptions of policy priorities, such as immigration, healthcare, or climate change. As I argued in Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT) (2025), this legislative-like power enables media gatekeepers to elevate certain political issues, simultaneously marginalising others. This capacity effectively grants media institutions an implicit constitutional role in defining democratic political agendas, thus profoundly shaping legislative discourse and policymaking.

Executive Function: Enforcing Epistemic Boundaries

Similarly, media institutions perform an epistemic executive function by actively policing boundaries of permissible discourse within society. Through selective editorial decisions, content moderation, and algorithmic content management, media gatekeepers enforce epistemic norms, silencing dissenting or controversial perspectives. This function mirrors the executive state's role in enforcing laws and maintaining social order—here, enforcing epistemic rather than physical boundaries.

Explicit examples include media practices around misinformation or 'fake news', where media gatekeepers decide which narratives are permitted and which are systematically censored or marginalised. Such practices, while sometimes justified, carry significant democratic risks by restricting epistemic pluralism and public debate. This executive-like epistemic enforcement underscores the constitutional significance of explicit fiduciary accountability frameworks regulating media's epistemic governance practices.

Judicial Function: Adjudicating Legitimacy of Narratives

Media institutions also exercise judicial-like epistemic authority by adjudicating the legitimacy or illegitimacy of competing narratives, discourses, and knowledge claims. Through editorial judgment, media entities determine which narratives achieve epistemic legitimacy and which are delegitimised or rejected. This epistemic adjudication parallels the judicial function of courts determining legal legitimacy within society.

Such adjudication profoundly shapes democratic outcomes by epistemically legitimising particular policies, political actors, or ideological positions, while delegitimising others. This judicial-like epistemic function raises critical constitutional questions about accountability, fairness, and transparency, underscoring the urgency of explicit fiduciary obligations to prevent arbitrary or biased epistemic adjudication.

3.2 Constitutional Implications

Having articulated the epistemic governance roles performed by contemporary media institutions and their analogy to traditional state organs, I now turn to the constitutional implications of recognising this epistemic power. My analysis here systematically addresses three primary constitutional concerns: the separation of powers, democratic accountability deficits, and neglected fiduciary obligations.

Separation of Powers Concerns

A fundamental constitutional principle underpinning democratic governance is the separation of powers, explicitly designed to prevent concentrations of authority that risk abuses and undermine accountability. Traditional constitutional structures separate legislative, executive, and judicial functions across distinct, formally accountable institutions. In contrast, contemporary media institutions implicitly consolidate these governance functions—agenda-setting (legislative), epistemic boundary enforcement (executive), and narrative adjudication (judicial)—within single institutions lacking comparable accountability mechanisms.

This consolidation raises significant constitutional concerns, challenging the foundational democratic principle that governmental powers must be institutionally separated and subject to rigorous checks and balances. Media gatekeepers exercise combined epistemic governance roles without explicit fiduciary or constitutional oversight, creating conditions ripe for epistemic authoritarianism, institutional bias, and democratic distortion. Therefore, recognising media's epistemic governance role within constitutional theory becomes critically important, necessitating robust regulatory and fiduciary frameworks analogous to those ensuring separation of powers within traditional state institutions.

Democratic Accountability Deficit

Closely related to separation of powers concerns is the democratic accountability deficit created by unregulated media epistemic governance. While traditional constitutional organs—legislatures, executives, judiciaries—operate within accountability frameworks, subject to electoral mechanisms, judicial oversight, and parliamentary scrutiny, media institutions currently lack explicit constitutional accountability structures for their epistemic governance practices.

As I demonstrated earlier in Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT) (2025), media's epistemic gatekeeping profoundly influences public understanding, policy debates, and democratic outcomes, yet media entities remain largely unaccountable for epistemic biases or gatekeeping abuses. Without explicit accountability frameworks, media institutions may systematically distort democratic discourse, marginalise dissent, and reinforce epistemic

clientelism, thereby undermining democratic legitimacy and epistemic fairness. This democratic accountability deficit highlights the constitutional necessity of fiduciary-epistemic governance mechanisms regulating media's epistemic practices.

Fiduciary Obligations Neglected by Media

Finally, media institutions' profound epistemic governance power imposes explicit fiduciary obligations toward democratic societies, obligations that currently remain largely unacknowledged or neglected. Fiduciary duties traditionally arise when institutions exercise significant discretionary authority over public interests, necessitating explicit duties of transparency, loyalty, fairness, and accountability.

Applying fiduciary epistemology to media institutions, I argue that media gatekeepers owe democratic societies fiduciary obligations to transparently manage their epistemic power, actively safeguarding epistemic pluralism, fairness, and democratic accountability. Neglecting these fiduciary obligations exacerbates epistemic clientelism, democratic deficits, and public mistrust, clearly highlighting the constitutional urgency of explicitly recognising and enforcing media institutions' fiduciary-epistemic responsibilities.

3.3 Epistemic Influence and Political Legitimacy

Having established explicit constitutional concerns surrounding media's epistemic governance power, I now illustrate concretely how media's epistemic gatekeeping profoundly influences democratic legitimacy, electoral outcomes, policy debates, and political governance. Drawing upon specific examples, I demonstrate how media's epistemic influence concretely shapes democratic processes and outcomes, reinforcing the urgency of explicit fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks.

Media Power in Elections

Media institutions significantly influence electoral legitimacy and outcomes by framing public understanding of political candidates, parties, and policy platforms. Through selective coverage, editorial decisions, and narrative framing, media gatekeepers can systematically legitimise or delegitimise particular candidates or political positions, profoundly shaping electoral perceptions and choices.

For example, during the UK's Brexit referendum (2016), media gatekeeping influenced electoral outcomes by selectively amplifying narratives around national sovereignty, immigration, and economic implications. Media's epistemic framing directly impacted voter perceptions, significantly shaping public sentiment and ultimately the referendum result. This example demonstrates media's epistemic power to influence electoral legitimacy, underscoring critical democratic accountability and fiduciary governance implications.

Influence on Policy Debates

Similarly, media's epistemic gatekeeping shapes public policy debates by determining which policy narratives achieve epistemic legitimacy. Media entities selectively amplify specific policy perspectives, while marginalising or delegitimising others, thus influencing policy choices, legislative priorities, and public acceptance.

A prominent example includes media coverage of climate policy, where epistemic gatekeepers historically legitimised climate-sceptic narratives, significantly delaying policy responses. Only when media framing shifted towards scientific consensus did public policy debates and legislative priorities meaningfully advance climate

action. This illustrates how media's epistemic governance directly influences policy legitimacy and democratic responsiveness, reinforcing constitutional arguments for fiduciary accountability.

Shaping Governance Legitimacy

Media institutions also profoundly shape the legitimacy of democratic governance itself by epistemically defining public perceptions of governmental effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. Through epistemic framing, media entities explicitly construct public trust or mistrust in governmental institutions, influencing democratic stability and societal cohesion.

For instance, media's framing of governmental responses to crises—such as COVID-19 management—influenced public perceptions of governance legitimacy. Selective narratives highlighting governmental failure or success directly impacted public trust and democratic legitimacy, illustrating concretely media's epistemic power to shape governance outcomes.

Case Examples of Media Shaping Political Outcomes

Actual empirical case studies further illustrate media's profound epistemic influence on political outcomes. During UK elections, selective media coverage of candidates (e.g., Corbyn versus Johnson in the 2019 General Election) framed electoral legitimacy, significantly influencing voter perceptions. Similarly, media's selective narratives surrounding immigration influenced legislative priorities and policy responses, demonstrating concretely media's epistemic governance role in democratic processes.

These case examples explicitly reinforce my constitutional argument, demonstrating concretely how media's epistemic gatekeeping significantly shapes democratic legitimacy, policy debates, electoral outcomes, and political governance. Given this profound epistemic influence, explicit fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks become constitutionally necessary to safeguard democratic legitimacy, epistemic fairness, and institutional accountability.

Having fully developed the constitutional implications of media's epistemic governance power, I next proceed to Chapter 4, providing empirical illustrations and case studies of institutional epistemic gatekeeping and algorithmic suppression.

4. Empirical Case Studies

Having developed the theoretical and constitutional dimensions of media's epistemic governance, I now turn to empirical analysis. Here, I illustrate concretely the phenomena of epistemic clientelism and gatekeeping practices through case studies drawn from my personal experiences, algorithmic content suppression, and analysis of mainstream media practices. These examples highlight the broader implications of media's epistemic influence on democratic discourse, applicable not only in the UK but also relevant to constitutional governance and democratic reform across most Western democracies.

4.1 Institutional Marginalisation of Dissenting Knowledge

Throughout my academic and intellectual journey, I have consistently encountered institutional gatekeeping that implicitly, yet systematically, marginalised my epistemic contributions. Numerous essays, manuscripts, and

theoretical papers—rigorously argued and methodologically sound—submitted to established academic publishers and media outlets were repeatedly returned without substantive or explicit reasoning.

The consistent absence of explicit editorial justification strongly implies epistemic clientelism: the exclusion of knowledge or ideas perceived as disruptive, controversial, or challenging to established institutional orthodoxies. These implicit rejections likely reflect underlying institutional preferences for epistemically compliant narratives, rather than genuine editorial or scholarly standards. Thus, institutional gatekeepers implicitly maintain epistemic conformity by systematically marginalising dissenting ideas without ever having to explicitly justify such marginalisation.

My experiences align directly with the theoretical framework of epistemic clientelism articulated in Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT) (2025), demonstrating how gatekeepers function implicitly as epistemic patrons, selectively privileging knowledge aligned with institutional interests or dominant ideological perspectives. Conversely, dissenting scholarship—though epistemically rigorous—becomes implicitly excluded, implicitly delegitimised, and effectively marginalised through editorial silence rather than explicit critique.

This implicit marginalisation significantly restricts epistemic pluralism and democratic deliberation, underscoring the urgent need for explicit fiduciary accountability mechanisms that require institutional transparency regarding editorial and epistemic decisions.

4.3 Comparative Case: UK Media Landscape

To further illustrate how epistemic clientelism shapes democratic discourse, I now examine mainstream UK media practices. The UK provides an instructive comparative case, highlighting how epistemic bias and clientelistic gatekeeping concretely influence public understanding, political legitimacy, and policy outcomes.

In covering major political events such as Brexit and governmental responses to COVID-19, UK mainstream media consistently exhibited implicit epistemic biases favouring dominant narratives aligned with established political or institutional interests. Media framing during the Brexit referendum amplified narratives around immigration and national sovereignty, implicitly marginalising economic or constitutional critiques that challenged prevailing institutional orthodoxies. Similarly, coverage of COVID-19 policies frequently prioritised government perspectives, implicitly marginalising critical scientific or policy analyses until public pressure compelled epistemic shifts.

Such practices illustrate epistemic clientelism in action: mainstream media institutions implicitly favour narratives beneficial to existing political or economic structures, systematically excluding or marginalising alternative epistemic perspectives. The absence of explicit fiduciary accountability mechanisms permits this implicit epistemic governance, reinforcing institutional conformity and undermining epistemic plurality, democratic accountability, and transparency.

Given these observations, explicit fiduciary accountability frameworks become essential, requiring media institutions to transparently justify epistemic choices, ensure balanced coverage, and safeguard epistemic fairness. This comparative analysis reinforces the constitutional urgency of fiduciary-epistemic accountability, addressing epistemic clientelism not only within the UK but as a model relevant across democratic societies.

5. Normative Framework for Epistemic Accountability

Having demonstrated through theoretical analysis and empirical case studies how contemporary media institutions exercise epistemic governance analogous to constitutional state organs, I now propose an explicit normative framework to ensure epistemic accountability. This chapter argues for constitutional recognition and fiduciary governance frameworks applicable to media institutions, articulating explicit fiduciary obligations and proposing concrete institutional mechanisms. Additionally, I offer specific legal and regulatory recommendations designed to ensure epistemic transparency, democratic legitimacy, and institutional accountability.

5.1 Rationale for Constitutional Recognition of Media

Necessity of Explicit Constitutional Acknowledgement

Given media's profound epistemic influence on democratic discourse and political legitimacy, explicit constitutional recognition of media institutions becomes necessary. Although constitutions across democratic nations typically define legislative, executive, and judicial responsibilities explicitly, media's epistemic governance roles remain constitutionally unrecognised, leaving their substantial democratic influence unregulated and largely unaccountable.

As illustrated through my empirical analyses, unacknowledged epistemic governance significantly undermines epistemic plurality, democratic accountability, and public trust. Constitutional silence implicitly perpetuates epistemic clientelism and democratic legitimacy deficits, allowing media institutions to exercise implicit constitutional powers without corresponding accountability frameworks. Explicit constitutional recognition thus becomes critical to address this democratic and epistemic governance gap.

Ensuring Democratic Legitimacy and Epistemic Justice

Actual constitutional recognition serves directly to enhance democratic legitimacy and epistemic justice. By acknowledging media's epistemic governance role, constitutional provisions can explicitly define fiduciary obligations, accountability mechanisms, and transparency standards necessary to safeguard democratic discourse. Such recognition positions media institutions within constitutional frameworks, providing clear democratic legitimacy and accountability for their epistemic influence.

Moreover, explicit recognition establishes constitutional foundations for fiduciary-epistemic governance principles that actively ensure epistemic fairness, transparency, and pluralism. By constitutionally requiring media institutions to uphold fiduciary responsibilities, democratic societies safeguard epistemic justice, prevent epistemic clientelism, and enhance overall democratic resilience.

5.2 Fiduciary-Epistemic Accountability Framework

Principles of Fiduciary Governance Applied to Media

To ensure democratic legitimacy and epistemic justice, I propose explicitly applying fiduciary governance principles to media institutions. Fiduciary governance traditionally requires actors holding significant discretionary authority over public interests to adhere to strict standards of transparency, loyalty, fairness, and

accountability. Given media institutions' profound epistemic governance power, applying fiduciary principles addresses democratic accountability deficits and prevents epistemic abuses.

Defining Explicit Fiduciary Duties

Explicit fiduciary duties applicable to media institutions include:

1. **Transparency:**

Media institutions must explicitly disclose editorial criteria, decision-making processes, and algorithmic content management practices. Such transparency ensures public awareness of epistemic governance decisions, facilitating accountability and democratic scrutiny.

2. **Epistemic Fairness:**

Media entities owe explicit fiduciary obligations to ensure epistemic fairness by actively safeguarding plurality and representation of diverse, dissenting viewpoints within public discourse. This fiduciary duty counteracts epistemic clientelism, ensuring democratic pluralism.

3. **Accountability:**

Media institutions must explicitly account for epistemic governance decisions, providing public rationales for editorial choices or algorithmic practices. Fiduciary accountability mandates transparent justifications, fostering public trust and democratic legitimacy.

Together, these explicit fiduciary duties construct a robust fiduciary-epistemic governance framework, designed to address the democratic and epistemic deficits arising from unregulated media epistemic power. By defining media institutions as fiduciary actors accountable to democratic societies, this framework significantly enhances transparency, fairness, and democratic accountability in epistemic governance.

5.3 Institutional Mechanisms for Accountability

Implementing the fiduciary-epistemic accountability framework requires robust institutional mechanisms designed to oversee, evaluate, and enforce media institutions' compliance with fiduciary obligations. To achieve this, I propose three specific institutional mechanisms:

Independent Media Fiduciary Boards

Firstly, I propose establishing independent fiduciary oversight boards explicitly tasked with ensuring media accountability. These fiduciary boards—composed of independent experts drawn from media ethics, constitutional law, epistemology, and civil society—would explicitly oversee compliance with fiduciary duties of transparency, epistemic fairness, and accountability.

Such boards would review media institutions' editorial practices, content moderation policies, and algorithmic systems, publicly reporting compliance or breaches of fiduciary standards. Independence from both state and commercial interests ensures unbiased fiduciary oversight.

Public Epistemic Audits

Secondly, periodic public epistemic audits provide explicit, structured mechanisms for assessing media institutions' compliance with fiduciary obligations. These epistemic audits—conducted by independent bodies

appointed through transparent public processes—would assess media institutions’ content diversity, transparency of editorial processes, and fairness in representing dissenting epistemic perspectives.

Publicly disclosed audit findings enable democratic scrutiny, transparency, and accountability, facilitating informed public discourse on epistemic governance.

Parliamentary Oversight Committees

Thirdly, establishing dedicated parliamentary oversight committees enhances democratic accountability of media institutions. Such parliamentary committees, focused on media fiduciary obligations, would regularly scrutinise media institutions’ epistemic governance practices, transparency standards, and compliance with fiduciary duties.

Explicit parliamentary oversight would strengthen democratic legitimacy, providing accountable institutional structures capable of addressing epistemic governance abuses or failures transparently and democratically.

Collectively, these explicit institutional mechanisms operationalise fiduciary-epistemic governance, providing robust oversight frameworks to ensure media institutions uphold transparency, epistemic fairness, and democratic accountability.

5.4 Legal and Regulatory Recommendations

Explicit implementation of fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks requires specific legal and regulatory measures. I propose concrete statutory provisions and policy guidelines designed to enforce transparency, epistemic fairness, and democratic accountability within media institutions.

Statutory Provisions on Epistemic Transparency

I propose statutory provisions explicitly mandating epistemic transparency within media institutions. Legislation would require media entities to disclose explicitly:

- Editorial guidelines and decision-making processes;
- Algorithmic systems and their content-ranking criteria;
- Any financial, political, or ideological interests that could influence epistemic choices.

Explicit legal obligations would significantly enhance public trust, allowing informed democratic scrutiny of media epistemic governance practices.

Policy Guidelines for Algorithmic and Editorial Decision-Making

I further propose explicit policy guidelines addressing algorithmic and editorial decision-making practices within digital and traditional media institutions. These guidelines would include:

- Mandatory disclosure and periodic independent auditing of algorithms used for content moderation, ranking, and dissemination;
- Clear protocols for editorial decisions, explicitly ensuring representation of diverse epistemic perspectives;

- Mandatory procedural fairness standards for editorial review and appeal mechanisms, explicitly safeguarding epistemic plurality.

Such guidelines ensure that algorithmic epistemic governance practices align transparently with democratic legitimacy and fiduciary obligations.

Collectively, these statutory and policy recommendations operationalise fiduciary-epistemic accountability, providing robust, transparent legal frameworks ensuring media institutions adhere to fiduciary governance standards. While developed primarily within the context of UK democratic structures, these proposals possess broader applicability, offering normative guidance for constitutional reform and media accountability across Western democratic jurisdictions.

6. Critical Discussion and Counterarguments

Having presented theoretical foundations, empirical analyses, and fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks, I now engage critically with anticipated counterarguments. This chapter addresses potential concerns regarding press freedom, practical implementation barriers, and philosophical objections surrounding epistemic pluralism and autonomy. My responses clarify that fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks enhance, rather than constrain, democratic legitimacy, transparency, and epistemic fairness.

6.1 Objection: Threat to Press Freedom and Independence

A primary counterargument against regulating media institutions through fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks is that such regulation might threaten press freedom and institutional independence. Critics argue that governmental oversight or fiduciary governance risks unintended censorship, governmental overreach, and political interference in media autonomy—critically undermining democratic freedoms and the constitutional principle of free expression.

While acknowledging these legitimate concerns, I emphasise the distinction between fiduciary accountability and direct governmental control. Fiduciary frameworks seek transparency and epistemic fairness without imposing content-specific editorial mandates or ideological conformity. Rather than limiting freedom, fiduciary accountability enhances democratic discourse by ensuring media transparency and fairness, thereby protecting epistemic pluralism from implicit clientelistic suppression.

Moreover, fiduciary accountability frameworks rely on independent institutional mechanisms—such as independent fiduciary boards and public epistemic audits—rather than direct governmental control. These mechanisms safeguard media independence from political influence, ensuring fiduciary governance promotes accountability without compromising democratic freedom.

In short, explicit fiduciary obligations enhance, rather than threaten, press freedom by requiring transparency and fairness—safeguarding democratic legitimacy, epistemic plurality, and institutional independence.

6.2 Practical Challenges and Feasibility

Beyond principled objections regarding press freedom, practical implementation of fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks may encounter institutional inertia, resistance, and feasibility challenges. Institutional gatekeepers—media entities, digital platforms, and even governmental bodies—may resist transparency requirements, epistemic audits, or fiduciary oversight mechanisms, perceiving these as burdensome or commercially disadvantageous.

Potential barriers include:

- **Institutional resistance:** Media and publishing entities might perceive fiduciary transparency obligations as intrusive, financially burdensome, or threatening existing business models.
- **Implementation complexity:** Operationalising fiduciary accountability—particularly transparency around algorithmic governance—may initially require substantial investment in infrastructure and technical expertise.
- **Regulatory capture risks:** Fiduciary oversight mechanisms could potentially be captured or influenced by dominant political or economic interests, undermining their intended epistemic fairness.

Acknowledging these challenges, I propose targeted solutions and mitigating strategies:

- **Independent fiduciary oversight:** Explicit independence of fiduciary accountability bodies (fiduciary boards, auditors) from political and corporate influence prevents regulatory capture, ensuring accountability remains objective and democratic.
- **Incremental implementation:** Gradual introduction of fiduciary transparency obligations, supported by governmental incentives or transitional support programmes, mitigates initial resistance and implementation burdens.
- **Transparent public engagement:** Public involvement and transparency in appointing oversight bodies enhance legitimacy, fostering trust among stakeholders—media institutions, civil society, and citizens.

These strategies pragmatically address implementation challenges, demonstrating fiduciary-epistemic accountability's feasibility and practical alignment with democratic governance. Rather than an impediment, fiduciary accountability emerges as a practicable, democratically necessary framework safeguarding epistemic fairness and legitimacy.

6.3 Philosophical Objections: Epistemic Pluralism and Autonomy

Finally, I address philosophical objections centred on epistemic pluralism and autonomy. Critics may argue that imposing fiduciary-epistemic accountability risks inadvertently constraining epistemic pluralism by implicitly privileging certain notions of 'fairness' or 'objectivity'. There is a concern that epistemic governance frameworks might impose implicit epistemic conformity, inadvertently suppressing legitimate diversity of viewpoints through normative or regulatory constraints.

While recognising these philosophical concerns, I clarify that fiduciary-epistemic frameworks, as proposed, do not impose any specific epistemic content or ideological conformity. Rather, fiduciary obligations require transparency and fairness of epistemic processes, not outcomes. Fiduciary governance safeguards pluralism by

actively requiring media institutions to justify epistemic decisions transparently, fostering accountability without imposing predetermined epistemic criteria or normative positions.

Additionally, my fiduciary framework addresses epistemic relativism concerns—avoiding claims of absolute epistemic objectivity. Instead, fiduciary duties focus on procedural fairness, transparency, and accountability, recognising the inevitability and legitimacy of diverse epistemic perspectives. Far from undermining pluralism or autonomy, fiduciary governance protects epistemic autonomy by preventing implicit epistemic clientelism, marginalisation, and structural biases.

Ultimately, fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks promote epistemic pluralism, fairness, and autonomy by safeguarding transparent, accountable epistemic governance processes, thereby strengthening rather than constraining democratic discourse.

7. Conclusion

Having rigorously argued that contemporary media institutions perform epistemic governance functions analogous to constitutional state organs, I have demonstrated the constitutional necessity of fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that controlling epistemic gatekeeping significantly shapes democratic legitimacy, societal narratives, and historical consciousness itself. Indeed, history is written by those who control epistemic gatekeeping; the present is shaped by those who govern epistemic power. Recognising media institutions as constitutional epistemic actors underscores the urgent need for fiduciary governance standards that ensure transparency, fairness, and democratic accountability.

7.1 Restatement of Thesis and Core Findings

Throughout the preceding chapters, I demonstrated that contemporary media institutions function as epistemic constitutional actors, exercising legislative-like (agenda-setting), executive-like (epistemic boundary enforcement), and judicial-like (epistemic adjudication) roles. My theoretical synthesis—drawing from Epistemic Clientelism Theory (ECT), fiduciary epistemology, and canonical critical frameworks (Foucault, Habermas, Gramsci, Chomsky/Herman)—illustrated clearly how epistemic governance profoundly impacts democratic legitimacy and societal understanding.

Empirical case studies demonstrated institutional epistemic clientelism—such as implicit marginalisation of dissenting scholarship—and algorithmic gatekeeping practices that systematically suppress epistemic plurality. These findings highlighted significant democratic legitimacy deficits, epistemic injustices, and public accountability gaps arising from unregulated epistemic power.

Crucially, my fiduciary-epistemic accountability framework addressed these deficits, proposing transparent fiduciary obligations and institutional mechanisms designed to safeguard epistemic fairness, transparency, and democratic legitimacy.

7.2 Epistemic Gatekeeping: Shaping History and Democratic Legitimacy

Throughout history, epistemic gatekeepers—those with the institutional power to control societal knowledge and discourse—have shaped collective understanding, democratic legitimacy, and historical consciousness. As I

have consistently argued throughout this thesis, ‘History is written by those who control epistemic gatekeeping; the present is shaped by those who govern epistemic power.’ Epistemic governance is thus constitutional in nature, directly influencing democratic legitimacy, public discourse, and societal values.

When epistemic gatekeepers implicitly privilege certain narratives while marginalising others, they explicitly shape public perceptions of political legitimacy, historical truth, and societal norms. The UK media’s role in shaping narratives around Brexit or COVID-19 policies demonstrated how epistemic gatekeeping can decisively influence democratic outcomes, public trust, and even long-term societal trajectories. Institutional epistemic clientelism, as detailed in my personal experiences, similarly illustrated how gatekeeping suppresses epistemic dissent, reinforcing dominant ideological frameworks.

Acknowledging media’s epistemic governance role constitutionally recognises this profound influence, underscoring the democratic necessity of fiduciary accountability mechanisms. Without explicit fiduciary oversight, epistemic governance risks implicitly perpetuating historical distortions, epistemic injustices, and democratic deficits. Fiduciary accountability ensures transparency, fairness, and epistemic pluralism, thereby strengthening democratic legitimacy and epistemic autonomy.

7.3 Constitutional and Democratic Implications

The recognition of media institutions as constitutional epistemic actors carries significant implications for constitutional theory and democratic governance. My analysis demonstrates that the conventional separation-of-powers framework, foundational to democratic constitutions, is incomplete without addressing the epistemic power exercised by media entities. By implicitly consolidating legislative-like, executive-like, and judicial-like epistemic functions, contemporary media institutions challenge established constitutional principles, risking democratic accountability deficits and epistemic injustices.

Explicit fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks address these deficits, providing constitutional mechanisms that safeguard transparency, epistemic fairness, and democratic legitimacy. By imposing fiduciary obligations on media institutions—transparency in editorial decisions, fairness in epistemic representation, accountability in epistemic adjudication—democratic societies strengthen constitutional governance, protect epistemic pluralism, and restore public trust.

Further, explicitly integrating epistemic governance within constitutional theory advances broader democratic reforms. Recognising media’s epistemic role promotes informed public discourse, robust democratic deliberation, and resilient governance structures capable of addressing epistemic clientelism and historical distortions. Such constitutional recognition enhances democratic responsiveness, epistemic autonomy, and democratic legitimacy.

7.4 Recommendations for Implementation and Legislative Reform

Recognising media’s constitutional epistemic role requires practical implementation through concrete legislative and regulatory measures. Drawing from the fiduciary-epistemic accountability framework developed throughout this thesis, I propose actionable recommendations designed to ensure transparency, accountability, and democratic legitimacy:

- **Statutory Epistemic Transparency Obligations:**

Legislation mandating media institutions to publicly disclose editorial criteria, decision-making processes,

and algorithmic ranking methodologies. This statutory requirement ensures transparency, enabling democratic scrutiny of epistemic governance practices.

- **Independent Fiduciary Oversight Boards:**

Establishment of independent fiduciary bodies charged with monitoring and evaluating media institutions' compliance with fiduciary obligations. Composed of experts independent from both governmental and corporate interests, these boards safeguard epistemic fairness and autonomy.

- **Public Epistemic Audits:**

Explicit regulatory frameworks mandating periodic public audits assessing media content diversity, epistemic fairness, and transparency standards. Audits provide democratic transparency, promoting accountability and informed public discourse.

- **Parliamentary Oversight Committees:**

Dedicated parliamentary committees responsible for scrutinising media's epistemic governance practices, fiduciary compliance, and transparency obligations. These committees strengthen democratic oversight, ensuring alignment with public interests.

- **Policy Guidelines for Algorithmic Accountability:**

Explicit regulatory policies requiring digital platforms and media entities to disclose algorithmic content moderation and ranking criteria. Mandatory procedural transparency protects epistemic pluralism from algorithmic suppression, promoting fairness and accountability.

Implementing these explicit legislative and regulatory reforms operationalises fiduciary-epistemic accountability, addressing democratic legitimacy deficits, epistemic clientelism, and historical distortions. These measures strengthen democratic governance, epistemic justice, and public trust.

7.5 Future Research Agenda

While this thesis advances theoretical frameworks and practical reforms addressing media's epistemic governance role, significant opportunities remain for future scholarly research. The following avenues merit further investigation:

- **Comparative Constitutional Analysis:**

Comparative research across democratic jurisdictions could illuminate diverse constitutional approaches to epistemic governance. Examining international regulatory practices provides insights into effective fiduciary-epistemic accountability mechanisms globally.

- **Algorithmic Accountability Frameworks:**

Further empirical research evaluating the efficacy and transparency of algorithmic accountability measures is essential. Investigating how different regulatory interventions influence algorithmic transparency and epistemic fairness can inform robust governance frameworks.

- **Empirical Evaluation of Fiduciary-Epistemic Mechanisms:**

Future studies assessing practical impacts of fiduciary governance frameworks—such as independent fiduciary boards and epistemic audits—can provide concrete evidence of their effectiveness in enhancing democratic legitimacy, public trust, and epistemic pluralism.

- **Global Epistemic Governance Standards:**

Exploring global or transnational epistemic governance standards could further promote epistemic justice

and democratic accountability worldwide. Research addressing international cooperation, epistemic governance harmonisation, and transnational media oversight can enhance global democratic resilience.

These research pathways extend my thesis, providing opportunities to further deepen scholarly understanding, practical effectiveness, and democratic legitimacy of fiduciary-epistemic governance frameworks.

7.6 Closing Reflection: Toward Democratic Renewal through Epistemic Autonomy

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that democratic legitimacy and epistemic justice fundamentally depend upon explicit recognition and fiduciary governance of epistemic gatekeeping. Those who control epistemic gatekeeping shape both historical narratives and contemporary democratic discourse. Left unaccountable, epistemic power risks implicitly perpetuating clientelism, marginalisation, and democratic deficits. Explicit fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks offer a constitutional remedy, safeguarding transparency, epistemic fairness, and democratic legitimacy.

Ultimately, the fiduciary governance approach celebrates epistemic autonomy, promoting active democratic renewal through accountable epistemic governance. Rather than limiting epistemic pluralism, fiduciary accountability protects epistemic freedom by ensuring transparent processes, robust democratic scrutiny, and diverse representation of perspectives. In this way, epistemic accountability emerges not as a constraint but as an essential democratic safeguard.

Integrating epistemic governance within constitutional frameworks fundamentally strengthens democratic institutions, enhances public trust, and promotes a vibrant, pluralistic democratic discourse. As democracies worldwide grapple with epistemic crises—polarisation, misinformation, declining public trust—fiduciary-epistemic accountability frameworks offer transformative potential.

History need not be passively written by unaccountable gatekeepers; democratic societies possess the means, through transparent and accountable epistemic governance, to ensure histories and futures reflect democratic autonomy, epistemic justice, and genuine pluralism. It is within our constitutional capacity to shape democratic discourse democratically, transparently, and epistemically fairly. This recognition, articulated throughout my thesis, represents not merely an academic argument but a democratic imperative.



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Author Contact

My name is Peter Kahl — I am an independent multidisciplinary researcher in Reading, England. My large body of work is inconsistently distributed over several platforms.

ORCID: <<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1616-4843>>

Email: <peter.kahl@juris.vc>

LinkedIn: <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/peter-kahl-law/>>

GitHub: <<https://github.com/Peter-Kahl>>

PhilPapers: <<https://philpeople.org/profiles/peter-kahl>>

Google Scholar: <<https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=z-yfRRYAAAAJ>>

Blog: <<https://pkahl.substack.com/>>

Correspondence regarding this paper is welcome.

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My Mission

I seek no alliances with political or institutional orthodoxies. My sole commitment is to epistemic authenticity, ethical autonomy, and democratic accountability. In this thesis, I challenge unaccountable epistemic gatekeeping and institutional epistemic clientelism, advocating robust fiduciary accountability frameworks, transparent epistemic governance, and democratic legitimacy. My aim remains ethical dialogue and principled collaboration, grounded in fiduciary duties to truth, epistemic fairness, and authentic democratic discourse.

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