

THREATS TO DEMOCRACY

Social media as opinion markets

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The digital economy has expanded significantly. Social media platforms are no longer just spaces for relentless advertising and private connections; they have become integral to the public sphere, acting as political arenas.

Criticism of social media often focuses on the ease with which anyone can publish their opinions, in contrast to traditional media with its editorial oversight. This criticism is especially relevant in the political public sphere of social media, where diverse groups, followers, and initiatives, rather than political parties, dominate. This new spectrum highlights society's diversity and fragmentation, with dynamic networks that do not ensure stable identities or participation.

Initially, it was believed that the internet, particularly social media, would support democracy. This assumption has proven incorrect. Platforms like Twitter often promote extremism, and polarisation goes viral, setting the tone of discourse. The impulsive, provocative, and ideological voices dominate, overshadowing thoughtful and deliberate discussion.

community: a collective opposition to various targets. This new political economy, driven by platform opinion markets, influences democracy without being subject to electoral accountability or political oversight.

For the past quarter-century, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google, Instagram, and TikTok have blurred the lines between public and private communications. The internet has become a vast, unregulated repository of texts and topics. The public sphere is now inundated with mere opinions and hate. What seems like increased freedom of expression is actually a freedom where opinions masquerade as facts, creating a confused world where credibility and truth are suggested through constant, unreflected repetition.

The new political economy describes an asymmetrically developing public sphere. Today's internet participants live in an opinion society where individual opinions do not coalesce into collective action. Opinions clash without dialogue, mutual understanding, or democratic compromise.

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In the virtual space, the public audience fractures into numerous groups bound by special interests. This undermines national public spheres. The internet facilitates rapid, decentralised communication but cannot consolidate scattered messages into coherent narratives.

Social media communities represent a hypermodern form of communality. Contrary to claims of dissolving communal bonds in modern society, these bonds are merely shifting to digital networks. However, these new forms of community lack the 'moral institutedness' of traditional communities and are often fragile in their communication.

The platform industry has created opinion markets where social and political mobilisation occurs. This environment fosters a desire for evaluation and judgment, self-reinforcing mechanisms, rapid-fire communication, social clustering, and identity-political biases. This has led to the creation of conformisms that highlight social differences. Resentment has become both a business model and a new sense of

Democracy cannot be reduced to the demands and expectations of individuals towards the state and elected representatives. The issue is not only with political elites who refuse to listen but also with citizens who feel no obligations towards the political community. Such attitudes lead those in power to view citizens primarily as consumers, expecting the state to solve problems. The idea that citizens are moral actors with reciprocal obligations, essential in a democracy, is often ignored. In a 'consumer democracy,' people vote but expect the state to deliver, neglecting their own responsibilities to contribute to the democratic process.

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