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Miira Hill

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The communicative constructions on TikTok and Facebook

Miira Hill

Platforms as agents in the communicative construction of social reality[1]

Digital platforms have become central to the formation and negotiation of social realities, acting as arenas where identities, relationships, and societal norms are both produced and contested (Castells 2013). This chapter investigates how societal rules and norms are constituted through language and are performatively enacted within digital discourses, and how platforms and their underlying technologies shape these processes. Focusing on right-wing discourses on Facebook (Hill and Puschmann 2025) and governance-related policies on sexism on TikTok (Hill, Runge, and Katzenbach 2024; Runge, Hill, and Katzenbach 2024), we examine how digital infrastructures contribute to the communicative construction and institutionalization of the public sphere.

Facebook and TikTok are two of the most influential social media platforms in the world, each with their own focus and user base. Facebook, launched in 2004 by Meta (formerly Facebook Inc.) in Silicon Valley, appeals to a broad range of age groups and emphasizes the sharing of text, image, and video content. TikTok, one of the world's fastest-growing platforms, specializes in visual content and has gained significant traction among younger users (Boffone 2021). Notably, despite its Chinese origins, TikTok, like Facebook, operates partly from California. Both platforms have experienced rapid growth and exert a substantial influence on global communication. However, they have also faced significant criticism.[2] Concerns about Facebook's influence on political discourse and user behavior have sparked public debate, especially concerning significant events like the Cambridge Analytica scandal during Brexit, its role in the spread of hate speech that contributed to violence in Myanmar, and its facilitation of human trafficking (Frenkel and Mozur 2018; Rosenberg, Confessore, and Cadwalladr 2018; Thomson 2021). Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, has been criticized for his mission statements, which are linked to an American frontier mythos, suggesting a discourse on an "open" and "connected" world as a means to colonize other countries and the future (Haupt 2021, 237). Furthermore, Facebook

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plays a pivotal role in shaping political discourse, with right-wing movements notably benefiting from its use (Bastos and Mercea 2017; Puschmann and Ausserhofer 2020; Rider and Murakami-Wood 2019). The platform's structure has enabled populist groups to employ discursive strategies of inclusion and exclusion, reframing social issues such as immigration and national identity, often simplifying complex discourses surrounding inequality and exploitation. TikTok has also faced significant concerns, including accusations of Chinese state influence on public discourse (Yu and Li 2022). Despite initially presenting itself as a diverse and free platform, studies indicate that TikTok censors' content from marginalized groups and reinforces patriarchal structures (Zeng and Kaye 2022). Its algorithms promote certain content and exclude content that challenges dominant narratives (Gerrard and Thornham 2020). Users often adopt "algospeak" strategies to bypass moderation algorithms, ensuring visibility for marginalized groups (Steen, Yurechko, and Klug 2023, 1). The platform has been criticized for promoting campaigns like "TikTok for Good," where "positivity" and "individual well-being" are overemphasized, and complex social issues are oversimplified to fit the platform's narrative (Scharlach 2024, 1). While criticism often centers on the ties between TikTok and China, similar dynamics are evident on US platforms, which have been criticized for their collaboration with the government and their influence on public discourses (Nenno and Lorenz-Spreen 2025).

Facebook and TikTok serve as powerful agents in the communicative construction of social realities. Assuming that digital platforms shape self-formation through their communication, this chapter explores the implications for individuals exposed to these influences. Drawing on empirical findings from studies on right-wing discourses on Facebook and sexism-related policies on TikTok, we examine how digital platforms construct social realities and influence public discourse. By applying Keller's (2013) and Knoblauch's (2014) communicative constructivism, along with Arendt's (1958) concepts of the public sphere, the study contributes to sociological theories about digital media and their influence on society.

The context of datafied societies

In democratic societies, the public sphere has traditionally been governed by regulations established by elected representatives, ensuring their equal applicability. These laws represent a set of rules that, when violated, are subject to sanctions imposed by the state. In contrast, the digital public sphere is shaped primarily by the rules of private companies, granting these platforms significant control over public discourse (Van Dijck 2013, 5). In the United States, Section 230 of the Telecommunications Act shields platforms from liability for user-generated content, similar to telephones, despite their active content moderation (Gillespie 2018). Platforms often revise their internal policies, analogous to house rules, while operating in a legally ambiguous space (cf. Zittrain 2006).

The recent juridification of the digital public sphere, driven by EU legislation like the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) is reshaping this landscape (Husovec 2024; Wagner, Borg, and Runeson 2024). Although this study focuses on a period prior to these changes, the mechanisms we identify remain relevant.

Still, algorithmic processes and moderation practices on platforms remain largely opaque. These entities shape public discourse through their systems and policies, with economic factors heavily influencing content curation (Cardon 2017; Gerlitz and Helmond 2013; Gillespie 2018). Moreover, public debates face threats not only from users but also from bots disseminating harmful content. With automated accounts generating online traffic, social bots profoundly influence public debate and elections (Keller and Klinger 2019). These dynamics underscore that digital platforms and online communication processes are far from neutral. This chapter applies the perspective of communicative constructivism to analyze how unspoken rules of private companies influence the digital public sphere. By reflecting unspoken rules in the context of online behavior, we can gain a nuanced understanding of power dynamics within the digital public sphere.

Communicative constructivism

The social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967) provides a foundational model for understanding how knowledge is socially produced, focusing on the processes through which certain understandings become accepted as legitimate knowledge. Communicative constructivism extends this analysis by emphasizing the dynamic, procedural nature of social reality construction.[3] Unlike Habermas, it views communicative action not as universally valid but as a means of organizing and constructing social realities (cf. Tomin and Averbeck-Lietz 2015). This approach highlights the importance of communication and materiality in shaping social realities (Keller, Knoblauch, and Reichertz 2013).

Publics can be understood as mediated spaces where constructed forms of knowledge circulate (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Keller, Knoblauch, and Reichertz 2013). In communicative constructivism, knowledge becomes institutionalized through communicative actions. These interactions solidify typifications that underpin institutional roles, actions, and meanings. Keller (2024, 49) conceptualizes the public sphere as a contested arena where actors employ communicative strategies to construct and challenge prevailing interpretations. Mediated discourse pre-structures the public sphere and influences how collective actors mobilize cultural resources to reshape existing meanings.[4] Materiality, whether linguistic, embodied, or technological, plays a central role in shaping the meaning and impact of communicative acts (Knoblauch 2013). For Keller, Foucault's concept of problematization further enhances this analysis showing how public issues are discursively constructed and serve as mechanisms of

power.[5] Discourse theoretical research has shown how public debate and subjectivation are influenced by historically evolved public problematizations (Hall 2019; Said 2009 [1978]; Spivak 2008 [1988]).

Nowadays, individuals increasingly construct their identities based on metrics and data generated by devices (Beer 2016; Bucher 2018; Kaerlein 2018). In digital publics, experiences, and problems are articulated multimodally, with subjectivation occurring in a back-and-forth movement between humans and machines (Haraway 1991; Pfahl and Traue 2022; Schünzel and Traue 2016). Knoblauch (2023, 47) argues for an integrated understanding of subjectivity as evolving through communicative action, critiquing classical constructivist approaches for their rigid division between subject and object. Drawing on Mead's concept of the self, he argues that the individuum is shaped through the balance of the socialized "Me" and the spontaneous "I," representing the individual self (Mead 1934). In this understanding, subjectivation is a process of internalization of the relation, in which the relationships to others and the experiences the individual makes are integrated into the self-image. Knoblauch's (2023, 40) concept of "double subjectification" highlights how digital mediatization blurs the lines between private and public life, pulling individuals into the public sphere through communicative self-representation.

The concept of objectivation explains why people believe society has an inherent reality, granting non-human entities a special legitimacy that creates facticity, similar to Marx's commodity character (Hill 2022).[6] Communicative constructivism offers insights into subjectivation processes by emphasizing the dynamic and interactive nature of identity formation rather than attributing it solely to historical influences and structural factors.

While social constructivism provides essential insights into how knowledge and social realities are constructed, it lacks a normative framework for evaluating public discourse. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's political theory, the public sphere can be envisioned as a space for political engagement where individuals act collectively to create shared meanings (Arendt 1958, 279).

> What makes man a political being is his faculty of action; it enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert, and to reach out for goals and enterprises that would never enter his mind, let alone the desires of his heart had he not been given this gift — to embarque something new (Arendt 1969, 82).

According to Arendt, public space is not merely a given entity but is created through action and debate. This occurs based on an agnostic principle, where productive conflict in political discourse is necessary to preserve the diversity of opinions and the plurality of public space. Arendt's (1958) orientation toward the ancient polis contrasted with modern societies, where she observed a worldliness and disappearance of the public sphere. She criticized the dominance of economic or social interests over the political sphere, leading to the loss of the true meaning of politics: collective action and care for the world.

According to Sharpe (2018, 108), discourse on social media has been understood as harmful to the public sphere in the Arendtian sense because it promotes conformism (Arendt 2017). Instead of fostering critical debate or independent thinking, it encourages uniform responses and the suppression of differentiated views. He concludes that the structure of social media constitutes a form of violence by restricting opportunities to speak authentically and freely. This form of speech restriction is seen as a subtle yet profound suppression of the plurality and free expression that Arendt aimed for. Ultimately, Arendt's reflections on the alienation of people in the modern world resonate with Schütz's emphasis on the challenges faced by strangers in new environments lacking familiar guidelines (Schütz 1972). While people are increasingly adapting to unfamiliar conditions in the digital realm, much like strangers, I would like to formulate, with Arendt, a normative claim for the public sphere, one where general and understanding-oriented communication takes center stage (Arendt 1958).

Digital platforms like Facebook and TikTok play a significant role in shaping social realities by mediating discourses and influencing how individuals understand themselves as social actors. By examining the interaction between communicative practices and platform policies, we can explore how digital spaces institutionalize specific forms of public discourse, shaping social realities. This analysis demonstrates how mostly undefined rules and chaotic conversations become habitualized and institutionalized, contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities, rather than fostering inclusive, political discourse.

Methods

This chapter presents a theoretical understanding of the empirical results from two case studies. The detailed methodological approaches are outlined in the original studies, as this section provides only a concise overview.

Case study 1: Right-wing discourses on Facebook

The first case examines how right-wing ideologies are expressed in Facebook comments, focusing on users' beliefs about democracy and nostalgic references to a culturally homogeneous past (Hill and Puschmann 2025). The dataset includes 2.5 million German-language comments posted between 2010 and 2019, with a focus on immigration, particularly the 2015–2016 "refugee crisis." Using a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative content analysis and a "data interview" based on a large language model (RAG), we (Hill and Puschmann 2025) analyzed 40,000 comments selected through keyword searches related to cultural values and nostalgia. This study highlights the ideological contradictions between right-wing nostalgia and nativist views, revealing tensions between liberal values and a conservative longing for a simpler past.

Case study 2: Sexism policies on TikTok

The second case investigates TikTok's governance strategies related to sexism, focusing on how the platform addresses gender inequality through its community guidelines and public communications (Runge, Hill, and Katzenbach 2024). The dataset includes TikTok's community guidelines from 2018 to 2022, along with a selection of 110 newsroom articles from an initial set of 724, chosen for their relevance to sexism and gender-related issues. These guidelines were retrieved using the Internet Archive to track their evolution over time. Employing Mayring's (2010) qualitative content analysis, this study analyzes the narrative and contextual elements of TikTok's discourse on sexism. This approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of how TikTok's algorithmic governance and moderation practices shape its stance on gender inequality, revealing how these practices either reinforce or challenge patriarchal structures.

The unspoken rules of platforms

In the digital era, platforms such as Facebook and TikTok play a pivotal role in shaping social realities. The discourses taking place on these platforms not only mirror societal trends but also actively contribute to how social entities become institutionalized. As discussed earlier, communicative constructivism emphasizes the dynamic and interactive nature of identity formation and the construction of social realities through communicative processes. In this context, the discourses on these platforms are not merely passive reflections of society but are actively shaping it. This chapter identifies two distinct tendencies in this context. First, chaotic conversation situations are becoming increasingly habitual across platforms. Second, partly undefined rules are becoming institutionalized, and technologies of self-regulation are emerging.

Habitualization of a chaotic conversation

> Our mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. But none of this is possible if people don't feel safe on our technologies. Our approach to safety includes writing clear policies about what is and isn't allowed on our platforms, developing sophisticated technology to detect and prevent abuse from happening in the first place, and providing helpful tools and resources for people to control their experience or get help. Learn more about how we're working to provide safe experiences for you and your loved ones.[7]

Facebook's platform policies emphasize safety and community-building, claiming to offer tools that protect users' personal feelings and promote constructive engagement. However, our analysis of user interactions on the platform reveals a different form of communication, characterized by disorganized, fragmented conversations and ideological mess.

Prevalence of nationalist and conservative attitudes

Our analysis of comments on Facebook reveals a strong presence of nationalist and culturally conservative attitudes, underpinned by a pervasive sense of societal and cultural decline. Many users express nostalgia for an idealized past and dissatisfaction with the current state of German society, often linking immigration, multiculturalism, and political elites to a perceived moral and social unraveling. Comments frequently portray refugees and immigrants as threats to national identity and the welfare state, while politicians such as Angela Merkel are blamed for neglecting German interests. One comment, for instance, illustrates this sentiment by expressing frustration over perceived neglect of German children and the country's overall decline, reflecting both economic concerns and a belief that the government prioritizes outsiders over its citizens (cf. Hill and Puschmann 2025, 193).

Conspiracy theories and hostility

Conspiracy theories add to the chaotic atmosphere, with some users framing immigration policies as part of a broader plot to undermine the country. For instance, one comment reflects anti-Semitic stereotypes by suggesting that Turkey has been controlled by Jewish individuals since the end of the monarchy (cf. Hill and Puschmann 2025, 195). This example shows how far-right ideologies and conspiratorial narratives dominate the discussions, creating an environment marked by distrust and hostility.

Nationalist rhetoric and fear of cultural erosion

This ideological orientation is further amplified by strong nationalist rhetoric that romanticizes a homogeneous past, evoking fears of cultural erosion. The comments reflect a deep longing for traditional values, which are perceived to be under attack by immigration and multiculturalism. In such an environment, conversations spiral out of control, with users aligning not through shared values but through the rejection of outsiders and the scapegoating of political figures. For example, one user criticizes the German SPD, claiming they have brought people into the country who are perceived as unproductive and disruptive, thereby portraying immigrants as a threat to societal stability (cf. Hill and Puschmann 2025, 193). This comment typifies how widespread hostility and fear dominate discourse, constructing immigrants as a threat to societal stability.

Normalizing of extreme viewpoints

The habitualization of exclusionary and fear-driven narratives normalizes extreme viewpoints, encouraging simplified and polarized perspectives. The disorder within these digital spaces leads to an ideological void, where collective

goals disintegrate and individuals are driven toward populist movements that reject "political correctness," democratic norms, and "elite manipulation." For example, a user criticizes Merkel's actions as "short-sighted" and lacking foresight, reflecting the broader trend of negative perceptions becoming deeply ingrained (cf. Hill and Puschmann 2025, 194). This constant reinforcement of negative perceptions entrenches specific ideologies, solidifying them as accepted norms on the platform.

Ultimately, the statements we analyzed reflect not just ideological mess but also a profound erosion of shared worldviews. Users engaging in these spaces are continually exposed to disjointed and hostile narratives, which, over time, become habitualized. This fragmentation of discourse not only disrupts meaningful conversation but also solidifies divisive ideologies, making the public sphere on Facebook (in this context) breeding ground for exclusionary, reactionary thinking.

The institutionalization of undefined rules and self-regulation

TikTok presents itself as a platform for diversity and inclusion, but its governance structures reveal a contradictory stance on issues such as sexism, gender representation, and queer identity. The platform increasingly features marginalized user groups in its communications and presents itself as a platform for inclusivity.

Commodification of marginalized identities

In its public communication, TikTok's focus on individual creators illustrates how the platform commodifies marginalized identities, presenting societal struggles as individual triumphs. For example, in its "Creator Spotlight Series," TikTok showcases users such as @itsnikki.g, a queer body-positive creator, and @Team2Moms, an LGBTQ+ family, focusing on their personal stories of positivity and self-empowerment.

For example, the user "@Team2Moms" shares their mission to normalize LGBTQ+ parenting by spreading love and positivity through the enjoyable and relatable moments of their family life (Runge, Hill and Katzenbach, 2024).

TikTok portrays these creators as symbols of empowerment and presents them in an individualized manner that focuses on personal achievements.

Normalizing gender discrimination

While TikTok provides high visibility for marginalized communities, this visibility is often framed in ways that trivialize deeper structural issues. Systemic struggles are portrayed as personal challenges. In the Guidelines, TikTok is also addressing systemic discrimination or sexism, as "everyday challenges"

or "biases women face," normalizing gender-based discrimination. By making sexism a phenomenon that seems to affect women, the platform sexualizes the term and leaves it in an undefined space that simultaneously describes the phenomenon as normal for a group in society. Furthermore, issues such as transphobia or sexism are rarely mentioned explicitly, with the platform opting for more neutral or positive framings, such as body positivity and self-expression.

Sexualization of female bodies

Further opacity of TikTok becomes evident in its regulation of nudity. While TikTok prohibits "female nipples," it does not address male nudity in the same way. This selective enforcement reflects underlying heteronormative norms that sexualize women's bodies, reinforcing gender binaries. The platform's tendency to equate nudity with sexual activity, particularly in non-sexual contexts such as breastfeeding, further reinforces sexist stereotypes.

TikTok's institutionalization of vague rules fosters a platform where self-regulation is encouraged but structural issues like gender inequality remain largely unaddressed. While TikTok increases the visibility of marginalized communities, it does so in a way that trivializes their struggles and commodifies their identities. At the same time, users are encouraged to regulate content based on broad, undefined guidelines, reinforcing TikTok's control over discourse while ignoring systemic inequality.

Self-regulation and subjectivation of regulation

Furthermore, TikTok encourages users to self-regulate content that violates community standards. The reporting process requires users to select categories such as "Hate Speech" or "Harassment" when flagging content, with subcategories for more specific issues such as "Gender Discrimination" or "Sexual Harassment." This process is supplemented by confirmation prompts, alternative options such as muting or blocking creators, and reminders that certain content, while unpleasant, may not necessarily breach TikTok's rules. While this approach fosters user participation in content moderation, it subtly shifts responsibility for content regulation onto users.

Additionally, TikTok's focus on individual violations, such as physical attacks or harassment, overlooks more subtle and systemic forms of sexism. For instance, while TikTok has increasingly referenced discrimination against transgender and non-binary individuals, it continues to frame sexism through a lens of "hateful behavior" rather than addressing it as a structural phenomenon. The shift in terminology from "Discrimination or Hate Speech" in 2018 to "Hateful Behavior" in 2022 further reflects this trend, as terms such as "hate" lack clear definitions and minimize the broader societal roots of discrimination.

The role of platforms in the institutionalization of social realities

Facebook in our case study habitualizes harmful and chaotic statements, while TikTok in our case study institutionalizes partly undefined rules around gender and body politics through self-regulation and vague governance structures. Over time, these interactions create "objective" structures of meaning that are perceived as natural by users. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. While the analysis highlights distinct trends on each platform, it is crucial to recognize that conservative voices are also present on TikTok, just as progressive movements exist on Facebook. Additionally, the two platforms were examined within different temporal contexts, and the methodologies employed in each case differed significantly. On Facebook, the study relied on a large and diverse corpus of social media data, which often reflected conflicting and chaotic worldviews. In contrast, the analysis of TikTok focused on community guidelines and newsroom articles, which revealed unexpected ways of problematizing gender. Despite these differences, a common theme emerges across both platforms: the institutionalization of unspoken rules through user behavior and platform governance. While the specific discourses on each platform vary, the structural mechanisms by which these platforms shape social realities and contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities are remarkably consistent.

The process of subject formation on digital platforms such as Facebook and TikTok vividly illustrates how the subject is continually shaped through public communication (Knoblauch 2023). When entering Facebook's comments section, the user might feel as if they are stepping into a volatile, ever-shifting discussion. The posts and comments flicker across the screen, each one more charged than the last; filled with frustration, nostalgia, and anger.[8] The world here seems fragmented, divided into sharp contrasts of "us" versus "them," where shared understanding is a rare commodity. Users participate, feeling either encouraged or pressured by the feedback of likes, shares, and approval from others (or bots), gradually shaping their sense of self through reactions. The communicative construction of the "Me" and "I" is thus constantly shaped by mediated publics. For some, the absence of dissent may even falsely confirm their perspective. It is a space where validation is fleeting, but searches for belonging (or exclusion) are unmistakable and profoundly shape the way users perceive both the world and themselves.

On TikTok, users enter a world that constantly pushes them to shape and refine their digital identities. Success is measured by numbers that determine visibility and, in turn, influence self-perception. The algorithm curates the feed to reflect engagement and signal which behaviors or ideas increase reach. When users see a sexist comment, the process of editing offers choices: Report it as harassment, hate speech, or something else? TikTok's cues subtly advise not to overreact and downplay some offenses. In this way, users not only curate

the content but, along with the cues available through the platform, also shape how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves. The "I" and "Me" are constantly evolving and shaped by communicative technologically mediated feedback. Each comment and like becomes a reflection that can prompt users to adjust their self-presentation. What works on the platforms is amplified, while what doesn't is forgotten. Through these structures, the digital self is continually curated. Both platforms blur the boundaries between the public and private self, with self-regulation and feedback loops subtly shaping identities in line with the platforms' commercial and algorithmic priorities.

The consequences of unspoken rules

This study, drawing on communicative constructivism, has examined how digital platforms shape social realities. By integrating theoretical perspectives, such as communicative constructivism and Arendt's idea of the public sphere, with empirical case studies, we have demonstrated the impact of digital platforms. These platforms, far from being neutral mediators, contribute to the creation of rules and norms that structure social identities and the public sphere. Through guidelines, algorithms, moderation practices, and user-generated content, they influence which discourses are institutionalized and which voices are marginalized. Publics, as contested arenas where definitions of truth and social issues are constructed and maintained (Keller 2024). As digital platforms actively shape the formation of the "I "and the "Me" through their communicative structures, this resonates with Knoblauch's (2023) notion of "double subjectivation." Digitalization makes the subject more public through increased self-representation in digital spaces, while also internalizing action and shaping both public and private aspects of subjectivity through communicativization, a process where communication becomes increasingly mediated by digital technologies.

Investigating knowledge circulation on platforms like Facebook and TikTok reveals that, despite their claimed openness, connectivity, and diversity, hegemonic power structures, including racism and sexism, persist within these digital ecosystems. On Facebook, right-wing populist narratives institutionalize exclusionary ideologies, often through fragmented statements, reducing complex social issues and limiting pluralistic debates. Meanwhile, TikTok's governance strategies, with vague rules concerning gender and body politics, encourage self-regulation but also commodify certain identities while marginalizing others, reinforcing existing social inequalities. By shaping what is socially acceptable or visible, these platforms play a crucial role in defining public discourse. In the examined case, TikTok exhibits "performative inclusivity," where LGBTQIA+ issues are reduced to marketable identities, obscuring deeper structural discrimination and inequality. This results in an "LGBTQIA+ washing effect," where critical social issues are addressed superficially, serving commercial interests

rather than fostering meaningful dialogue. Meanwhile, Facebook in the studies case demonstrates "performative exclusion," where disregarding discourses serve the economic interests of an operating company. This commercial orientation expands the boundaries of acceptable speech and undermines communication focused on mutual understanding.

Arendt argued that political action and plurality are fundamental to a vibrant public sphere (Arendt 1969). Controversly, the speech situation amplified by digital platforms threatens to erode the social fabric. By prioritizing engagement metrics over substantive dialogue, they inadvertently foster conformity and performativity (Sharpe 2018), limiting opportunities for speech and pluralistic debate. This dynamic subtly undermines the political in Arendt's sense, deviating from her vision of an ideal public sphere.

Rather than fostering an environment in which individuals can engage and act collectively, these platforms contribute to the erosion of the political by reinforcing alienation and division. Exclusionary rhetoric and commercial interests lead to a lack of collective political action. The strong presence of nostalgia and the desire to return to traditional values in these digital discourses supports Bauman's (2017) claim that in times of uncertainty, politics often retreats into the realm of collective memory, where the past becomes malleable and manipulable. Contrary to the initial euphoria surrounding digitalization, platforms seem to be the place where the political is constrained. The way to speak that is fostered by platforms can have devastating consequences, including the spread of misinformation and the erosion of democratic values, creating fertile ground for reactionary movements.

This chapter underscores the central role that platforms such as Facebook and TikTok play in shaping communication and broader societal structures. Their governance models have tangible consequences for public discourse and democracy, determining amplification and silencing. The circulation of knowledge on these platforms, whether in the form of conspiracy theories or gender identity, has profound effects on public opinion. Considering the growing convergence between social media and traditional media, it is critical to re-evaluate platform governance against established media norms and regulations (Napoli 2019). In any case, platforms must be held accountable for their societal impact, as they bear little resemblance to a mere telephone in terms of their role in shaping social realities.

Notes

1 Many thanks to Niklas Berger for his valuable suggestions and to my resilient laptop for making it to the finish line.

2 Mark Zuckerberg first gained attention at Harvard by hacking the university's photo database to create "Facemash," a platform where users rated female classmates' appearances, effectively using stolen data to enable the social judgment of women.

3 Knoblauch (2023) critiques Berger and Luckmann's assumption of a pre-social, autonomous subject that externalizes its intentions and, through this process of objectification, creates an objective social world into which it is subsequently socialized.
4 Keller emphasizes that the public sphere is not a static entity but a dynamic field of inter-discourse competition, where the framing of issues and the actors' legitimacy are constantly negotiated.
5 According to Keller (2024), public issues are framed through struggles over what is "true" or "problematic" within public discourse. These discourses serve as mechanisms of power and shape social realities by determining which interpretations are considered acceptable.
6 "Objectivations may be, however, also objects, such as smoke signals, ink letters, or hieroglyphs. Objectivations also refer to objects to the degree that we relate to them in some active way" (Knoblauch 2014, 159).
7 https://about.meta.com/actions/safety Last accessed September 26, 2024.
8 In Retrotopia (2017), Zygmunt Bauman argues that nostalgia for an idealized past emerges in response to present uncertainties, fueling resistance to change and diversity, a sentiment often exploited by populist leaders.

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