



# **DIGITAL DEMOCRACY AND THE DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE**

**MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY  
VOLUME SIX**

**CHRISTIAN FUCHS**

**ROUTLEDGE**  


# Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere

This sixth volume in Christian Fuchs' *Media, Communication and Society* series draws on radical Humanist theory to address questions around the digital public sphere and the challenges and opportunities for digital democracy today.

The book discusses topics such as digital democracy, the digital public sphere, digital alienation, sustainability in digital democracy, journalism and democracy, public service media, the public service Internet, and democratic communications. Fuchs argues for the creation of a public service Internet run by public service media that consists of platforms such as a public service YouTube and Club 2.0, a renewed digital democracy and digital public sphere version of the legendary debate programme formats Club 2 and After Dark.

Overall, the book presents foundations and analyses of digital democracy that are interesting for both students and researchers in media studies, cultural studies, communication studies, political science, sociology, Internet research, information science, as well as related disciplines.

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# Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere

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Volume Six

Christian Fuchs

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# Chapter Ten

## *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Alienation*

*Challenges and Opportunities for the Advancement of Digital Democracy*

10.1 Introduction

10.2 The Public Sphere as a Concept of Critique

10.3 The Capitalist Colonisation of the Digital Public Sphere

10.4 For a Public Service Internet

10.5 Conclusions

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### 10.1 Introduction

Over the last 15 years, the term “social media” has become established. As a rule, this category is used as a collective term for social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, video platforms such as YouTube, photo-sharing platforms such as Instagram, blogs, and microblogs such as Twitter and Weibo, messenger apps such as WhatsApp, live-streaming platforms, video apps, and wikis such as Wikipedia. It is not always clear what exactly is considered “social” about “social media” and why older information and communication media such as email, the telephone, television, and books should not also be considered social. The problem here is that in sociology there is not one, but many understandings of the social (Fuchs 2017, Chapter 2, 2021, Chapter 2).

Internet platforms like Facebook and Google, which dominate the social media sector, are among the largest corporations in the world. At the same time, social media have become an integral part of politics and public communication. Some right-wing politicians have lots of followers on various Internet platforms and spread propaganda and false news via these media. The Arab Spring and the various Occupy movements have shown that social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are important in social movements. Today, no politician, no party, no NGO, and no social movement can do without



profiles on social media. Therefore, the question of the connection between social media and the public sphere arises. This chapter sheds light on this question.

Section 10.2 introduces a concept of the public sphere as a concept of critique. Section 10.3 uses the concept of public sphere to critique capitalist Internet platforms. Section 10.4 is about the potentials of a public service Internet.

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## 10.2 The Public Sphere as a Concept of Critique

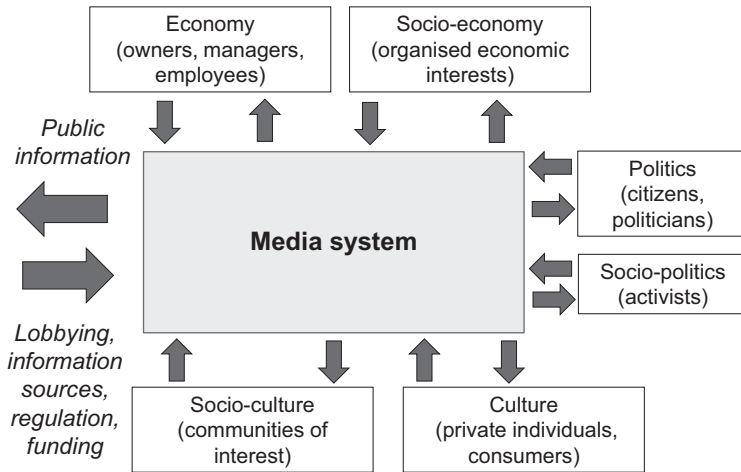
The public sphere forms an important aspect of any political and social system. Habermas understands “public” to mean spaces and resources that are “open to all” (Habermas 1991, 1). That is why we speak, for example, of public service media, public opinion, public education, public parks, etc. The concept of the public sphere has to do with the common good, with the idea that there are institutions that are not only used and owned by a privileged few, but from which everyone benefits.

Public institutions and goods are often, but not necessarily, regulated and organised by the state. There may be certain access requirements. For example, public service media in many countries are financed by a legally regulated licence fee. Such access conditions should be affordable for everyone and there should be no discrimination by class, income, origin, gender, etc. in access to public resources. Accordingly, a park to which only people with white skin colour had access at the time of segregation in the United States or South Africa was not a public good.

The public sphere also has to do with public debate about society, interests and decisions that are taken collectively and bindingly for all. It therefore has an inherently political character. The public sphere mediates between other spheres of society as a kind of interface between economy, culture, politics, and private life. An ideal-typical public sphere is a sphere that organises “critical publicity” (Habermas 1991, 237) and “critical public debate” (Habermas 1991, 52). If criticism is silenced or suppressed, there is no public sphere.

The public sphere is a sphere of public political communication that mediates between the other subsystems of society, i.e. the economy, politics, culture, and private life. The public sphere is a medium of political communication. Through the public sphere, it is possible for people to learn about, discuss and participate in politics.

The media system is part of the public sphere in modern society. Figure 10.1 illustrates a model of the role of the media in the modern public sphere (see Fuchs 2016). Media



**FIGURE 10.1** The media system as part of the public sphere. Further development on the basis of Habermas (2008), Diagram 1 and 2

organisations produce publicly accessible information in the media system. Such information usually serves to inform about news, to educate, and to entertain. Through public news, members of the political system inform themselves about important events in society and politics. News is a trigger of political communication. People talk about what is based in politics and ideally participate in the decision-making process themselves. In capitalist society, different interest organisations such as employers' associations, workers' associations such as trade unions, lobby organisations, political parties, NGOs, private individuals, social movements, etc. try to influence the media companies' reporting. This happens, among other things, through interviews, press releases, lobbying, advertising, public relations, the interweaving of organisations, etc. The media system interacts with the economy, politics, and culture. Citizens (purchase, broadcasting fee, subscriptions, etc.), the state (e.g. media funding) as well as business organisations (advertising) enable an economic resource base for the media to operate with. Politics regulates the framework conditions under which the media operate. Culture is a context of worldviews and ideologies that shape the climate of society and thus also have an influence on the media system and its organisations.

Following Jürgen Habermas, Friedhelm Neidhardt, and Jürgen Gerhards, we conceive of the **public sphere as a communication system** that is in principle universally accessible and open for participation by everyone, provides public access to information and enables public voice, visibility, attention, communication, and debate about topics that matter for and in society. The "public can be perceived as a knowledge-producing

system that follows its own rules of establishing attention and, sometimes, consent” (Neidhardt 1993, 347).

Neidhardt and Gerhards argue that the public sphere includes speakers, media of communication, and audiences.

There must exist: speakers. who say something; an audience, that listens; and mediators who relate speakers and the audience if they are not in immediate contact with one another—that is, journalists and the mass media. [...] The speakers try to win the attention and the consent of a larger collectivity of fellow citizens, and out of this collectivity a subsample becomes interested and engaged in those topics and opinions the speakers offer them. This subsample is the audience. It is defined by a minimum of activity in the form of observing, listening, reading, attending a meeting, or sometimes becoming speakers themselves. The audience is thus constituted by participation. [...] Speakers are conceived as all those behind the mass media who raise their voices in order to reach the public and to constitute audiences. Regularly these are ‘prolocuters’ of societal institutions, of interest organizations and civic groups; often, too, some are experts and intellectuals.

(Neidhardt 1993, 340, 342)

We define the public sphere (1) as a specific communication system that is distinct from other social systems. The system is constituted on the basis of the exchange of information and opinions. Individuals, groups and institutions raise certain issues and express opinions on the issues. If one does not necessarily think of the term discussion as academic events – because public communication includes demagogic communication of persuasion as well as a rational weighing of arguments – one can describe the public sphere as a system of discussion. [...] The peculiarity of the communication system of the public arises (2) from the fact that all members of a society may participate, the audience is fundamentally ‘unclosed’, the boundary of the system is open.<sup>1</sup>

(Gerhards and Neidhardt 1990, 15)

There are **different types of publics** organised at different levels of society: Micro-publics are small publics where humans directly encounter each speech to each other, mainly face-to-face, in everyday situations and spaces such as “cafés, coffee houses, and salons”<sup>2</sup> (Gerhards and Neidhardt 1990, 20). Meso-publics are medium-sized publics that take on the form of public events. An example is a rock concert or an evening-filling

book presentation with accompanying audience discussion. Macro-publics are large-scale publics at the level of society where many humans access information or communicate. Mass media often play an important role in macro-publics. The public sphere is an interface of society that interacts with the economic system, the political system, and the cultural system. Based on these assumptions, Figure 10.2 presents a model of the public sphere.

We distinguish between micro-, meso-, and macro-publics as three types of public that together constitute the public sphere. Economic, political, and cultural actors interact with the public sphere in that they are the subject of news, information, and entertainment. Furthermore, economic, political, and cultural groups often try to lobby in the public sphere to gain visibility and support for their views and positions. Financial resources from the economy provide funding for media organisations operating in the public sphere (e.g. in the form of ad revenue, subscription fees, licence fees, etc.). Policies and governments' laws regulate the media. Norms, moral values, worldviews, and ideologies

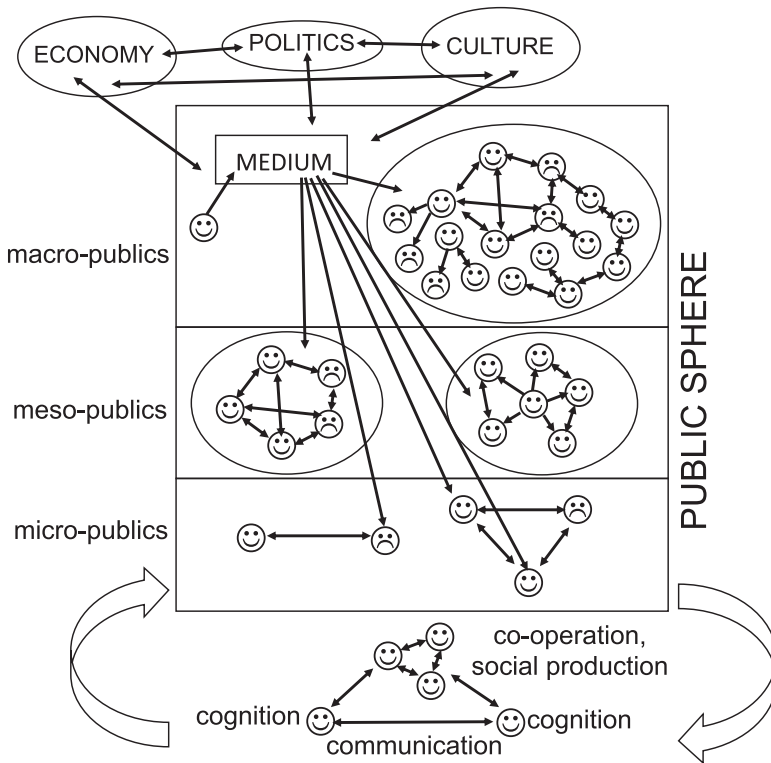


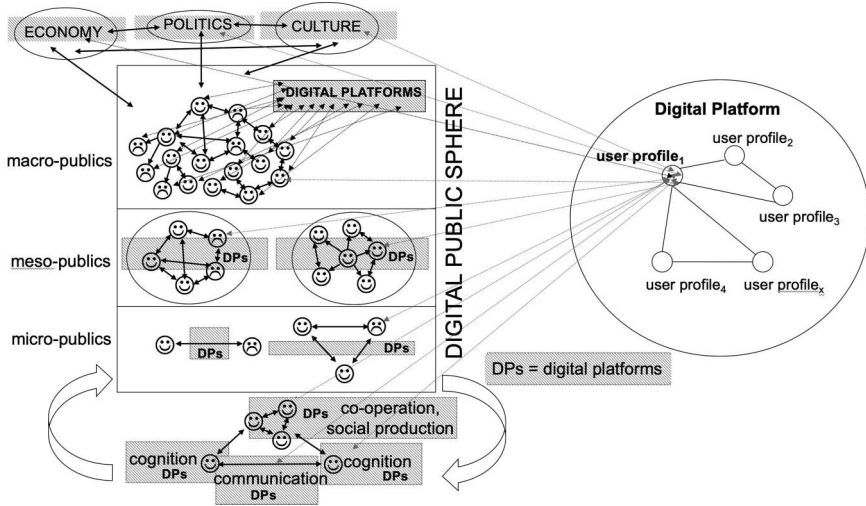
FIGURE 10.2 A model of the public sphere

as cultural structures influence public opinion, public debates, and the public sphere at large. At the level of human practices, human beings cognise, which means that they perceive, experience, and interpret the world; they communicate with each other about what is happening in their social environment and society; and they co-operate and socially produce new realities and social relations. Processes of cognition, communication, and co-operation are the practices that form the foundation of the public sphere where opinions, content, and knowledge are produced. Opinions, content, and knowledge produced in the public sphere influence the way humans think, communicate, and produce.

The traditional public sphere in modern society has been shaped by mass communication and mass media, where there is a small group of information producers using mass media for spreading information that is received and interpreted by audience members in various ways. Figure 10.3 visualises the digital transformation of the public sphere that has two main features (see Fuchs 2021):

- Prosumption:  
On the Internet, consumers of information become potential producers of information, so-called prosumers (productive consumers);
- Convergence:  
On the Internet, the boundaries between different social practices, social roles, social systems, and different publics converge so that humans on Internet platforms with the help of single profiles act in a variety of roles with a variety of practices and a variety of different publics.

The patterned boxes in Figure 10.3 indicate that in the digital public sphere, human practices, micro-, meso-, and macro-publics, economy, politics, and culture are mediated by digital platforms. The dotted lines indicate that on digital platforms, individuals' practices, cognition processes, communication processes, co-operation processes, their activities in various publics, and their social roles in the economy (e.g. as worker or manager), politics (e.g. as citizen or politicians), and culture (e.g. as member of a certain religion or community), converge on digital platforms' user profiles. The information and communication processes organised with the help of digital platforms are different from traditional mass media in that all users are enabled to produce content and communicate with others through the platforms. A digital platform is an online software environment that organises human information, activities, and communication via mobile phone apps, the Internet, and the WWW. Platforms are also social systems, which means they have a political-economic organisation and specific cultures. In the platform economy, we find organisational models



**FIGURE 10.3** The digital transformation of the public sphere

that determine specific forms of ownership, work, economic activities, and relations of production. Platform governance involves laws and policies that determine what the actors involved in platforms are allowed to do, not to do, and are expected to do.

For Habermas, the public sphere is autonomous from capital and state power, that is, from economic and political power. In the public sphere, the “[l]aws of the market [...] [are] suspended as were laws of the state” (Habermas 1991, 36). State censorship of political opinion and private ownership of the means of production of public opinion contradict the democratic character of the public sphere. For Marx, socialism is an alternative to the capitalist economy and the bourgeois state. Marx describes the Paris Commune, which existed from March to May 1871, as a socialist form of public sphere. It was an attempt to organise politics and the economy democratically.

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, of acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time. [...] Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the State was laid into the hands of the Commune.

(Marx 1871, 331)

Marx was a critic of the capitalism's restricted public sphere. "The public sphere with which Marx saw himself confronted contradicted its own principle of universal accessibility" (Habermas 1991, 122). Liberal ideology postulates individual freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly) as universal rights. The particularist and stratified character of capitalist class society undermines these universal rights. It creates inequality and thereby unequal access to the public sphere. There are two inherent limitations to the public sphere that Habermas discusses:

- The restriction of the freedom of speech and freedom of public opinion: If people do not have the same formal level of education and the same material resources at their disposal, this may constitute restrictions on access to the public sphere (Habermas 1991, 227).
- The restriction of the freedoms of assembly and association: Powerful political and economic organisation possess "an oligopoly of the publicistically effective and politically relevant formation of assemblies and associations" (Habermas 1991, 228).

Habermas argues that the bourgeois public sphere is colonised and feudalised as a result of these restrictions. Such a public sphere is not a true public sphere, but a class-structured political space. The public sphere is a concept of immanent critique that lends itself to the critique of the deficits and problems of modern society. Habermas does not say that the public sphere exists everywhere, but that it should exist. Immanent critique compares proclaimed ideals with actuality. If it finds that reality contradicts its own ideals, it becomes clear that there is a fundamental contradiction and that reality must be changed to overcome this incongruity. The bourgeois public sphere creates its own limits and thus its own immanent critique.

Public spaces and public spheres do not exist only in the West. The claim that the public sphere is a Western-centric or Eurocentric concept is misguided. Such a critique also risks justifying undemocratic regimes that are anti-Western and promote authoritarianism under the guise of opposition to Western-centrism and Eurocentrism. The public teahouse is an ancient cultural practice and space that can be found in many parts of the world. Di Wang compares the Chinese teahouse of the early 20th century to British public houses (Wang 2008). It is a public space that people from all walks of life and classes frequent for different reasons. The Chinese word for the teahouse is 茶馆 (*chágǔān*). Chengdu is the capital of the south-western Chinese province of Sichuan. "Teahouses in Chengdu, however, were renowned for their multiclass orientation. One of the 'virtues'

of Chengdu teahouses was their ‘relative equality’” (Wang 2008, 420). Women were excluded at first, but had full access from around 1930. These teahouses were not only cultural spaces but also political meeting places where political debates took place and where political plays were performed, attracting the interest not only of citizens but also of government informers. Wang discusses the importance of teahouses in the 1911 railway protests in Chengdu. Public meeting places are spheres of citizen engagement that can become spheres of political communication and protest.

The various Occupy movements that emerged after the global economic crisis that began in 2008 were movements in which protest and the occupation of spaces converged. Self-managed public spheres were created for political communication. The creation of these public spheres took place not only in the West, but in many parts of the world in times of global capitalist and social crisis. A common aspect of these protests was that in many of them the tactic of transforming spaces into public spheres and political spaces was used and that these protests took place in a general social crisis. Resistance is as old as class society. Public spheres have been produced as resistant publics throughout the history of class societies. So public spheres exist wherever people gather to organise collectively and express their anger and resentment at exploitation and domination.

One of the connections between Habermas’ *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas 1991) and his *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984, 1987) is the elucidation of how stratification processes work in modern society. While Habermas speaks of the “refeudalisation” of the public sphere in his early work (Habermas 1991, 142, 158, 195, 200, 231), later the term colonisation of the lifeworld comes to the fore, encompassing “monetarization and bureaucratization” (Habermas 1987, 321, 323, 325, 386, 403). According to Habermas (1987, 323), these two processes “instrumentalise” the lifeworld and thus the public sphere. In my own approach, I assume that it is not two but three processes of exercising power that colonise and refeudalise the public sphere (Fuchs 2008, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2020a):

- Through *commodification* and *class structuration*, the logic of money, capital, and the commodity form penetrates people’s everyday lives and lifeworlds.
- Through *domination*, society is organised in such a way that particular interests prevail and some people or groups or individuals gain advantages at the expense of others.
- *Ideologisation* presents partial interests, exploitation, and domination as natural and necessary by presenting reality in a distorted or manipulated way.



The commodity form, domination, and ideology are the three main forms of stratification in capitalist society. The critical theory of the public sphere is a critique of the commodity form, a critique of domination, and a critique of ideology. A critical theory of the public sphere is therefore a critique of alienation. What Horkheimer (1947) called instrumental reason, Marcuse (1941) called technological rationality<sup>3</sup> and Lukács (1923/1971) called reification, takes on three forms in capitalism:

- Class structuration and the commodity form instrumentalise people's labour power and people's needs in capitalist consumption.
- Political rule instrumentalises people's ability to act politically in such a way that they do not make decisions themselves but leave them to dominant groups.
- Ideology tries to bend and instrumentalise people's consciousness and their subjective interests.

Karl Marx (1867) emphasised that the logic of accumulation shapes capitalism. This logic has its origin in the capitalist economy. But it also shapes modern politics and modern culture, which are about the accumulation of political and cultural power. The accumulation of power takes the form of the accumulation of capital, decision-making power, and defining power. Accumulation results in asymmetries of power, namely class structures, structures of domination, and ideology (see Table 10.1).

Alienation means that people are confronted with structures and conditions that they cannot control and influence themselves. Individuals do not control the economic, political, and cultural products that influence their lives and everyday life. Alienation means the "loss of the object, his product" (Marx 1844, 273). Alienation means "vitality as a sacrifice of life, production of the object as loss of the object to an alien power, to an *alien* person" (Marx 1844, 281). Use-values, collectively binding decisions, and collective meanings are social products resulting from human practices. In

**TABLE 10.1** Antagonisms in three types of alienation

Type of alienation	Alienating subjects	Alienated subjects
Economic alienation: exploitation	Ruling class, exploiters	Exploited class
Political alienation: domination	Dictator, dictatorial groups	Excluded individuals and groups
Cultural alienation: ideology that results in disrespect	Ideologues	Disrespected individuals and groups

**TABLE 10.2** The main actors in alienated society and in Humanist society. Based on Fuchs (2020a, 103: Table 4.4)

	Alienated society	Humanism
Economy	The exploited	The socialist/commoner
Politics	The dictator	The democrat
Culture	The ideologue/demagogue	The friend

capitalist society, however, they are controlled by only a few, resulting in objectively alienated conditions.

Table 10.2 illustrates the antagonism between alienated and Humanist society along the three social dimensions of economy, politics, and culture. In an alienated society, the main actors are the exploiter in the economy, the dictator in politics, and the ideologue/demagogue in culture. Humanism is the alternative to the alienated society. In a Humanist society, the main actors are the socialist and the commoner in the economy, the democrat in politics, and the solidary friend in culture.

### 10.3 The Capitalist Colonisation of the Digital Public Sphere

In discussions about the Internet and social media, it is relatively often heard that through the possibilities of prosumption (consuming producers on the Internet: Media consumers become producers of content) and user-generated content, an electronic democracy, a digital/virtual public sphere, and a participatory culture are emerging. These arguments are also widespread in the academic debate.<sup>4</sup> A far-reaching democratisation of society, including the capitalist economy, is inferred from a technical change, although class antagonisms, political antagonisms, and ideological lines of conflict continue to exist and have even deepened. Is today's Internet and social media a new public sphere that expands democracy, or a new form of colonisation of the public sphere?

Jürgen Habermas has been sceptical in respect to the question of whether or not, how, and to what degree the Internet and social media advance a public sphere. He argues that the Internet is democratic only in that it "can undermine the censorship of authoritarian regimes" but that it also fragments the public into "a huge number of issue publics" (Habermas 2006, 423). In a recent essay, Habermas (2021) interprets studies of the public sphere as confirmation of his view that the Internet and social media have resulted in "semi-public, fragmented and self-circulating discussion" and deform the public sphere (Habermas 2021, 471, translation from German). In his most recent monograph, Habermas (2019, volume 2: 799, translated

from German) argues that containing the “dangers of the oligopolistically dominated and for the time being destructively rampant Internet communication” requires transnational political regulation, which shows the importance of policies in the context of the (digital) public sphere.

Users of today’s Internet and social media face ten problems (see Fuchs 2016, 2017, 2019b, 2021):

1) **Digital capitalism/digital class relations:**

Digital capital exploits digital labour. It results in capitalist digital monopolies and contributes to the precarisation of life.

2) **Digital individualism:**

Digital individualism consists of users accumulating attention with and approval of individual profiles and postings on social media. Its logic treats people as mere competitors, undermining interpersonal solidarity.

3) **Digital surveillance:**

State institutions and capitalist companies carry out digital surveillance of people as part of the digital-industrial and surveillance-industrial complex.

4) **Anti-social social media:**

Social media are anti-social social media. Edward Snowden’s revelations and the Cambridge Analytica scandal have shown that capitalist social media are a danger to democracy. Right-wing ideologues and demagogues spread digital authoritarianism on social media and attack the public service media, independently acting media and quality media as “metropolitan elite media”.

5) **Algorithmic politics:**

Social media are characterised by automated, algorithmic politics. Automated computer programmes (“bots”) replace human activity, post information, and generate “likes”. This has made it more difficult to distinguish which information and which approval comes from a human or a machine.

6) **Filter bubbles:**

Fragmented online publics are organised as filter bubbles in which opinions are homogeneous and disagreements either do not exist or are avoided.

7) **Digital tabloids:**

The digital culture industry has organised social media as digital tabloids controlled by digital corporations. Online advertising and tabloid entertainment dominate the Internet, displacing engagement with political and educational content.

**8) Influencer capitalism:**

On social media, so-called “influencers” shape public opinion, creating power asymmetries in terms of online attention and visibility, and living a commodified online culture that presents the world as an endless shopping mile and a huge shopping mall.

**9) Digital acceleration:**

Due to digital acceleration, our attention capacity is strained by superficial information that hits us at very high speed. There is too little time and too little space for conversations and debates on social media.

**10) Fake news:**

Post-truth politics and fake news are spreading globally through social media. In the age of new nationalisms and new authoritarianism, a culture has emerged in which false online news is spread, many people distrust facts and experts, and there is an emotionalisation of politics through which people do not rationally examine what is real and what is fiction, but assume something is true if it suits their state of mind and ideology (see Fuchs 2018, 2020a).

These ten tendencies have led to a digital public sphere colonised and feudalised by capital, state power, and ideology, characterised by economic, political, and cultural asymmetries of power. The Internet certainly has potentials to socialise human activities in the form of communication, cooperative work, community building, and the creation of digital commons. However, class relations and structures of domination colonise the Humanistic potentials of the Internet and society. In contemporary capitalism, people are confronted with an antagonism between precarity and austerity. The Internet and social media are shaped by class structures and inequalities.

Social media today are insufficiently social. They are dominated by capitalist corporations, demagogues, and ideologues, although they carry germinal forms and potentials for a world and forms of communication beyond capitalism. Digital alternatives like Wikipedia, digital workers’ cooperatives,<sup>5</sup> alternative online media like Democracy Now! digital commons like Creative Commons or free software are the manifestation of a truly social and socialised Internet. Within capitalism, however, such projects often remain precarious and can only challenge the power of the dominant corporations and actors (Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, etc.) in a very limited way. The history of alternative projects within capitalism is a history of resource scarcity and precarious, often unpaid and self-exploitative labour.

**TABLE 10.3** Three forms of digital alienation

Form of digital alienation	Manifestations of digital alienation
Economic digital alienation:digital exploitation	(1) Digital capital/digital labour (digital class relations), digital monopolies; (2) digital accumulation/individualism/competition
Political digital alienation:digital domination	(3) digital surveillance, (4) anti-social social media/digital authoritarianism, (5) algorithmic politics, (6) fragmented online publics and online filter bubbles
Cultural digital alienation:digital ideology	(7) digital culture industry/digital tabloids, (8) influencer capitalism, (9) digital acceleration, (10) false news/algorithmic politics

**TABLE 10.4** Antagonisms in three forms of digital alienation

Form of alienation	Alienating subjects	Alienated subjects
Economic alienation: exploitation	Digital capital	Digital labour
Political alienation: domination	Digital dictators	Digital citizens
Cultural alienation: ideology, disrespect	Digital ideologues	Digital humans

In Table 10.3, the ten problems of social media and the Internet in digital capitalism already elaborated are related to the three forms of alienation. There are thus economic, political, and cultural forms of digital alienation.

In Table 10.4, digital alienation is presented in the form of three antagonisms: class antagonism, in which digital capital exploits digital labour; political antagonism between digital dictators and digital citizens; and cultural antagonism between digital ideologues and digital people. Alienation is the instrumentalisation of human beings. In digital alienation, people are instrumentalised with the help of digital technologies such as the Internet, mobile phones, social media, apps, Big Data, Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, etc. Digital alienation is the instrumentalisation of humans online.

For a detailed analysis of the digital antagonisms through which the public sphere is colonised and feudalised in digital capitalism, we must refer the reader to further literature (Fuchs 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019b, 2019c, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2021). However, we can cite individual examples here.

In the year 2020, the world's largest Internet corporations were Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet/Google, Amazon, Alibaba, and Facebook. In the Forbes list of the 2,000 largest corporations in the world, they ranked ninth (Apple), 13th (Microsoft, Alphabet/Google), 22nd

(Amazon), 31st (Alibaba), and 39th (Facebook) in the same year.<sup>6</sup> Digital commodities sold by these corporations include hardware (Apple), software (Microsoft), online advertising (Google, Facebook), and digital services such as online shopping (Amazon, Alibaba). The turnover of these six groups amounted to 857.5 billion US dollars in 2019. The turnover of these six groups is roughly equal to the GDP of the 22 least developed countries in the world, whose combined GDP in 2018 was 858.3 billion US dollars. These countries are Sudan, Haiti, Afghanistan, Djibouti, Malawi, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Yemen, Guinea-Bissau, Congo, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Mali, Burundi, South Sudan, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Niger (United Nations 2019). Five digital corporations are together economically more powerful than 22 states. And these corporations constitute monopolies in operating systems (Microsoft), search engines (Google), online shopping (Amazon and Alibaba), and social networks (Facebook). The Internet economy is dominated by a few global corporations. Therefore, one cannot speak of digital capitalism having led to an end of monopoly power or a plural economy. Capital concentration is an inherent tendency of capitalism.

Table 10.5 shows data on the ten most viewed YouTube videos. YouTube is the world's most used Internet platform after Google.<sup>7</sup> In discussions about the digital public sphere,

**TABLE 10.5** The most watched YouTube videos of all times

Position	Title	Video Type	Owner	Number of Views
1	Pinkfong Kids' Songs & Stories – Baby Shark Dance	Children's music	SmartStudy (Samsung Publishing)	8.3 billion
2	Luis Fonsi – Despacito	Music	Universal Music (Vivendi)	7.3 billion
3	Ed Sheeran – Shape of You	Music	Warner Music	5.3 billion
4	LooLoo Kids – Johny Johny Yes Papa	Children's music	Mora TV	5.1 billion
5	Wiz Khalifa – See You Again	Music	Warner Music	5.1 billion
6	Masha and the Bear – Recipe for Disaster	Children's entertainment	Animaccord Animation Studio	4.4 billion
7	Mark Ronson – Uptown Funk	Music	Sony Music	4.1 billion
8	Psy – Gangnam Style	Music	YG Entertainment (distributed by Universal)	4.0 billion
9	Miroshka TV – Learning Colours – Colourful Eggs on a Farm	Children's music	Miroshka TV	3.9 billion
10	Cocomelon Nursery Rhymes – Bath Song	Children's music	Moonbug Entertainment	3.9 billion

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most-viewed\\_YouTube\\_videos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-viewed_YouTube_videos), accessed on 14 April 2021.

it is often heard that user-generated content means that everyone has a voice on social media and that the public sphere has become pluralistic and participatory. On the Internet, it is true that anyone can easily produce and publish digital content. But there are asymmetries of visibility and attention. Entertainment dominates over education and politics. At the content level, social media is primarily digital tabloid media. Multimedia corporations and celebrities dominate online visibility and online attention. All of the ten most viewed YouTube videos are music videos. Copyright is controlled by profit-oriented corporations. The example shows that Internet platforms have not created a participatory culture, but that media corporations and celebrities control online attention and the online public sphere.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal dominated the world news in the first half of 2018. Cambridge Analytica was a consulting firm founded in 2013 that was active in the use of Big Data, among other things. Donald Trump's former far-right adviser Steve Bannon was the vice president of this company. Cambridge Analytica bought access to the personal data of 90 million people collected on Facebook via a personality test. Personal data was collected from participants' Facebook profiles. Cambridge Analytica used this data in Donald Trump's election campaign to spread personalised fake news. This scandal is remarkable in several respects:

- The Cambridge Analytica scandal shows that right-wing extremists will resort to any means at their disposal to spread their ideology. This also includes fake news and surveillance.
- The Cambridge Analytica scandal shows that Facebook accepts dangers for democracy in order to make money from data. Facebook operates on the logic that ever-larger amounts of data processed and collected on the Internet are good for the profits of the corporation, which uses them to personalise advertising, i.e. to tailor it to individual user behaviour, and to sell it.
- The Cambridge Analytica scandal shows that the neoliberal deregulation of the economy has led to Internet corporations being able to act as they wish.
- The Cambridge Analytica scandal shows the connection between digital fascism, digital capitalism, and digital neoliberalism, which poses a threat to democracy.

The three examples (Internet corporations' economic power, YouTube's attention economy, Cambridge Analytica) exemplify individual dimensions of the ten forms of colonisation of the digital public sphere discussed in this section. The first example shows the power of Internet corporations, which illustrated aspects of digital monopolies (aspect

one of the ten problems of today's Internet). The second example was about the digital attention economy on YouTube. This is an expression of digital tabloidisation and the digital culture industry (Problem 7), where celebrities dominate attention and visibility (Problem 8). The Cambridge Analytica scandal illustrates a combination of several of the ten problems, namely digital capitalism (Problem 1), digital surveillance (Problem 3), digital authoritarianism (Problem 5), and online fake news (Problem 10).

The three examples illustrate that the assumption that the Internet and social media are a democratic, digital public sphere is a myth and an ideology that trivialises the real power of Internet corporations and phenomena such as online fake news and online fascism. But the question is whether a democratic Internet is possible. The next section deals with this question in the context of public service media.

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## 10.4 For a Public Service Internet

The digital public sphere has the form of the colonised and feudalised public sphere through the logic of accumulation, advertising, monopolisation, commercialisation, commodification, acceleration, individualism, fragmentation, the automation of human activity, surveillance, and ideologisation. The Internet and social media are dominated by commercial culture. Platforms are largely owned by large profit-oriented corporations. Public service media operate on the basis of a different logic. However, the idea of a public service Internet has not yet been able to gain acceptance and sounds alien to most ears, as there are hardly any alternatives to the capitalist Internet today.

Media have (a) a political-economic and (b) a cultural dimension. On the one hand, they need resources such as money, legal frameworks, staff, and organisational structures in order to exist. In this respect, they are economic organisations. However, they are special economic organisations that are also cultural organisations, since they produce meanings of society that serve public information, communication, and opinion-forming. Since opinion formation and communication also include political opinion formation and political communication, media organisations have implications for democracy and the political system. As cultural organisations, all media organisations are public because they publish information. As economic organisations, on the other hand, only certain media organisations are public, while others take on a private sector character, i.e. are organisations that have private owners and operate for profit. Public service media and civil society media, on the other hand, are not profit-oriented and are collectively owned



by the state or a community. Table 10.1 illustrates these distinctions. Public service media are public in the sense of the cultural public and the political-economic public. They publish information and are owned by the public.

The communication studies scholar Slavko Splichal (2007, 255) gives a precise definition of public service media:

In normative terms, public service media must be a service *of* the public, *by* the public, and *for* the public. It is a service *of* the public because it is financed by it and should be owned by it. It ought to be a service *by* the public – not only financed and controlled, but also produced by it. It must be a service *for* the public – but also for the government and other powers acting in the public sphere. In sum, public service media ought to become ‘a cornerstone of democracy.’

(Splichal 2007, 255)

The means of production of public service media are publicly owned. The production and circulation of content are based on a non-profit logic. Access is universal, as all citizens are given easy access to the content and technologies of public service media. In political terms, public service media offer diverse and inclusive content that promotes political understanding and discourse. In cultural terms, they offer educational content that contributes to the cultural development of individuals and society.

Due to the special qualities of public service media, they can also make a particularly valuable democratic and educational contribution to a democratic online public sphere and digital democracy if they are given the necessary material and legal opportunities to do so.

Signed by more than 1,000 individuals, the public service media and public service Internet Manifesto calls for the defence of the existence, funding, and independence of public service media and the creation of a public service Internet (Fuchs and Unterberger 2021). Among those who have signed the Manifesto, which was initiated by Christian Fuchs and Klaus Unterberger, are Jürgen Habermas, Noam Chomsky, the International Federation of Journalists, the European Federation of Journalists, the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), and the European Communication and Research Education Association (ECREA).

Two ideas for the expansion of digital democracy and the creation of public service Internet platforms are the *public service YouTube* and *Club 2.0*.

### 10.4.1 Public Service YouTube

Digital media change the traditional relationship between media production and media consumption. While in classical broadcasting these two aspects are separated, on the Internet consumers can become producers of information (so-called prosumers, i.e. producing consumers). User-generated content offers the possibility for the audience to become a producing audience. In this way, the educational and democratic mandate of public service broadcasting can be extended in the form of a participatory mandate. In this context, participation means offering an online platform with the help of which citizens can make user-generated audio-visual content publicly available.

YouTube holds a de facto monopoly in the realm of user-generated video distribution platforms. Public service media have the necessary experience and resources to develop, offer and operate online video and online audio platforms. This could create real competition for YouTube's dominance. YouTube is often criticised for distributing fake news, hateful, terrorist, and far-right content. Relatively little is done about these problems because video content is not vetted by humans when it is uploaded. YouTube works according to the logic "The more user-generated content, the better, as this creates more advertising opportunities and more profit". YouTube's advertising- and profit-orientation leads to blindness to the quality of the content. A public YouTube, on the other hand, could fulfil public service media's democratic remit by not simply allowing videos on all topics ("anything goes") to be uploaded, but by opening up certain politically and democratically relevant topics (e.g. as accompaniment to certain TV or radio programmes) to users for uploading content at certain times and for a limited period of time.

The principle should be followed that all submitted contributions are published and archived and thus made accessible to the public without time limit, thus creating a user-generated democratic online public sphere. However, the videos submitted should be checked by trained moderators before release to see if they contain racist, fascist, sexist or otherwise discriminatory content. Such content should not be released.

The individualism of today's social media could be broken by deliberately addressing and encouraging social, cultural, and civic contexts such as school classes, university seminars, adult education courses, workplace communities, civil society organisations, etc. to submit collectively produced videos.

Public service media have large archives with vast amounts of content. These contents could be digitised and made available on a public service video and audio platform. The Creative Commons (CC) licence is a licence that allows content to be reused. The

CC-BY-NC licence allows content to be reproduced, redistributed, remixed, modified, processed, and used for *non-commercial* purposes as long as the original source is acknowledged.<sup>8</sup> The CC-BY-NC licence is very suitable for digitised content from the archives of public service media that is made publicly available. In this way, the creativity of the users of a public service audio and video platform can be promoted, as they are allowed to generate and distribute new content with the help of archive material. In this way, public service media's educational remit could take on the form of a digital creativity remit. There is also the possibility that at certain points in time, topics are specified and users are given the opportunity to edit and remix certain archive material and upload their new creations with the help of this material. A selection of the content submitted in this way could be broadcast on television or radio on a regular basis or specific occasions. All submitted contributions could be made available on the platform.

Public service video and audio platforms can be offered in individual countries (as ORFTube, BBCTube, ARDTube, ZDFTube, SRGTube, etc.). However, it also makes sense for public media broadcasters to co-operate and jointly offer such platforms or to technically standardise their individual platforms and network them with each other. The fact that in the field of television there are cooperations, for example, between ORF, ZDF, and SRG for 3sat or between ARD, ZDF, and France Télévisions for Arte, makes it clear that it makes sense to create similar forms of co-operation in the field of online platforms. A pan-European public YouTube could rival the commercial YouTube in terms of popularity and interest and could create real competition for the Californian Internet giant Google/Alphabet that owns YouTube. However, the argument that one is too small oneself and that one has to start at the European level is often used to postpone concrete projects or not start at all. If the legal conditions are in place nationally, it may be easier to start at the national level in order to then set an international example and, in a further step, advance European co-operation.

The public service YouTube is a concrete utopia of participatory democracy. A concrete utopia is a realistic and realisable project that goes beyond the current state of society and realises democratic innovations. A public service YouTube that aims at user-generated production of democratic content promotes political participation and co-operation of citizens as well as concrete, active and creative engagement with democratic content through digital production and cooperative production. Participatory democracy means infrastructure, space, and time for democratic processes. The public service YouTube offers a material possibility and infrastructure for the practice of digital democracy.

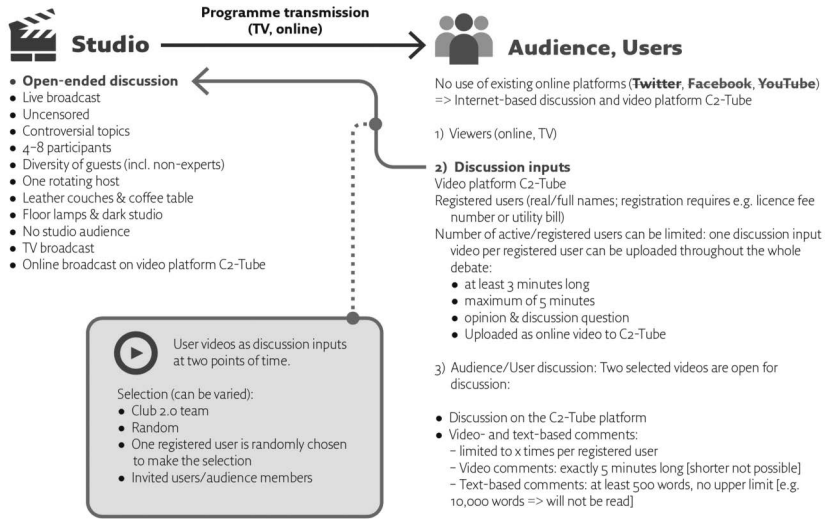
### 10.4.2 Club 2.0

The journalists Kuno Knöbl and Franz Kreuzer created the concept of Club 2 for the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF). It was a discussion programme that was usually broadcast on Tuesday and Thursday. The first episode was screened on 5 October 1976, the last on 28 February 1995. About 1,400 episodes were broadcast on ORF.

The concept of Club 2 sounds rather unusual to many people today, as we are so used to short duration, high-speed formats, and the lack of time in the media and our everyday lives. Open, uncensored, controversial live discussions that engage the viewer differ from accelerated media in terms of space and time: Club 2 was a public space where guests met and discussed with each other in an atmosphere that offered unlimited time, that was experienced publicly and during which a socially important topic was discussed. Club 2 was a democratic public sphere organised by public service broadcasting.

Space and time are two important dimensions of the political economy of the public sphere. However, a social space that provides enough discussion time does not guarantee an engaged, critical, and dialectical discussion that transcends one-dimensionality, delves into the depth of an issue, and clarifies the commonalities and differences of worldviews and positions. Public space and time must be intelligently organised and managed so that appropriate people participate, the atmosphere is appropriate, the right discussion questions are asked and it is ensured that all guests have their say, listen to each other and that the discussion can proceed undisturbed, etc. Unrestricted space, a dialectically controversial and intellectually challenging space and intelligent organisation are three important aspects of publicity. These are preconditions of slow media, non-commercial media, decolonised media, and public interest media.

Is a new version of Club 2 possible today? How could a Club 2.0 look and be designed? If one speaks of a second version ("2.0"), this means on the one hand that Club 2 should be revitalised in a new form in order to strengthen the public sphere in times of authoritarian capitalism. On the other hand, it also means that one has to take into account that society does not stand still, has developed dynamically, and therefore new public communication realities such as the Internet have emerged. A Club 2.0 therefore also needs a somewhat updated concept of Club 2 that leaves the basic rules unchanged but expands the concept. Whether Club 2.0 is transformed from a possibility into a reality is not simply a technical question, but also one of political



**FIGURE 10.4** Concept of Club 2.0

economy. It is a political question because its implementation requires the decision to break with the logic of commercial, entertainment-oriented television dominated by reality TV. Club 2.0 is therefore also a political decision for public service media formats. Its implementation is also an economic issue, as it requires a break with the principles of colonised media, such as high speed, superficiality, scarcity of time, algorithmisation and automation of human communication, post-truth, spectacle, etc. The implementation of Club 2.0 is a question of resources and changing power relations in the media system.

Figure 10.4 illustrates a possible concept for Club 2.0. It is a basic idea that can certainly be varied. The essential aspects are the following:

• **Club 2's ground rules:**

Club 2.0 uses and extends the traditional principles of Club 2. The television broadcast is based on the tried and tested Club 2 rules, which are crucial to the quality of the format. Club 2.0 broadcasts are open-ended, live, and uncensored.

• **Cross-medium:**

Club 2.0 is a cross-medium that combines live television and the Internet, thereby transcending the boundary between these two means of communication.

• **Online video:**

Club 2.0 is broadcast live online via a video platform.

- **Autonomous social media, no traditional social media:**

Existing commercial social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) are not suitable as they are not based on the principles of slow media and public interest media. The use of YouTube is likely to result in advertising breaks that would interrupt and destroy the discussion.

- **Autonomous video platform C2-Tube:**

Club 2.0 needs its own online video platform (C2-Tube). C2-Tube allows viewers to watch the debate online and via a range of technical devices.

- **Interactivity:**

C2-Tube also has interactive possibilities that can be used to a certain degree.

- **User-generated discussion inputs:**

It is possible for users to generate discussion inputs and for these to be actively included in the programme. This characteristic is linked to a non-anonymous registration of users on the platform. Anonymity encourages Godwin's Law, which states: "As the length of an anonymous online discussion increases, the probability of a comparison to Hitler or the Nazis being made approaches one". The number of registered and active users can be limited. For example, the selection of active users can be done randomly. Alternatively, all registered users can be allowed to participate in the discussion. User-generated discussion inputs should preferably have a video format. The number of user-generated discussion inputs that can be uploaded to the platform should be limited (ideally to one upload per active user). Since information overload makes discussion difficult, it makes sense to set certain limits in order to facilitate a decelerated debate culture. Active users can make contributions to the discussion on the platform.

- **Interface between the studio discussion and the video platform:**

At certain times during the live broadcast, a user-generated video is selected and shown as input for the studio discussion. In such videos, users formulate their opinion on the topic and can also introduce a discussion question. In a two- to three-hour discussion, about two to three such user-generated inputs could be used. It is inevitable that a selection mechanism will be used to decide which user-generated videos will be shown in the live broadcast. There are several ways to do this, such as random selection, selection by the production team, selection by a registered user determined at random, selection by a special guest, etc.

- **Discussion among users:**

Club 2.0 allows users to discuss the programme topic with each other. The discussion can take place during and/or after the live broadcast. The selected videos that function as discussion inputs can be released for discussion on C2-Tube. Comments should be possible in video form and written form. There should be a minimum length for written comments and possibly a maximum length for video comments. In order to implement the slow media principles and avoid the Twitter effect of accelerated stagnation, the number of comments possible per user per discussion should be limited.

- **The forgetting of data:**

Video data is very storage-intensive. Therefore, the question arises of what should happen to all those videos that are uploaded to the platform but are not broadcast and not opened for discussion. Since they are practically of less importance for public discussion, they could be deleted after a certain time. To do this, users need to be made aware that uploading a video in many cases involves forgetting the data. Contemporary social media store all data and meta-data forever. Forgetting data is therefore also a counter-principle. The online discussions consisting of written and video comments can either be archived and kept or deleted after a certain period of time.

- **Data protection and privacy friendliness:**

Most social media platforms monitor users for economic and political purposes, to achieve monetary profits through the sale of personalised advertising, and to establish a surveillance society that promises more security but undermines privacy and installs a regime of categorical suspicion of all citizens. Club 2.0 should be very privacy-friendly and only store a minimum of data and meta-data necessary to run the platform. This includes not selling user data and using exemplary data protection routines. Data protection and privacy friendliness should therefore be design principles of Club 2.0. However, this does not mean that privacy protection should take the form of anonymous discussion, as anonymity can encourage online hooliganism, especially on politically controversial issues. Data protection is therefore much more about the storage and use of data.

- **Social production:**

Today's dominant social media are highly individualistic. In contrast, the production of user-generated videos for Club 2.0 could take the form of cooperative, social

production that transcends individualism and creates truly social media, so that Club 2.0 is integrated into educational institutions where people learn and create knowledge together by elaborating discussion inputs and collective positions and producing them in video form. This requires that the topics of certain Club 2.0 programmes are known somewhat in advance. This can be achieved by publishing a programme of topics. Groups of users can prepare videos together, which they can upload to the platform on the evening of the relevant Club 2.0 programme as soon as the upload option is activated.

Club 2.0 is an expression of the democratic digital public sphere. It manifests a combination of elements of deliberative and participatory democracy. Club 2.0 offers space and time for controversial political communication and enables citizens to participate collectively and individually in the discussion through videos and comments. The communicative aspect of deliberative democracy and the participatory idea of grassroots democracy are combined in the Club 2.0 model.

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## 10.5 Conclusions

Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is often portrayed by critics as idealistic, idealising, Eurocentric, and anti-pluralistic. Such critiques fail to recognise that Habermas' concept of the public sphere is above all an immanent concept of critique that makes it possible to compare the real state of society with democratic possibilities.

I have argued in this chapter and other works for an interpretation of Habermas based on Marx and Marx's theory of alienation. I distinguish three forms of alienation that colonise and feudalise the public sphere: economic alienation (commodification and class structuration), political alienation (domination), and cultural alienation (ideologisation).

The critical theory of the public sphere is suitable as one of the foundations of a critical theory of the Internet and social media, i.e. of communicative action in the age of digital capitalism. A critical theory of the digital public sphere makes it clear that the Internet and social media do not constitute a democratic public sphere in digital capitalism. In digital capitalism, humans are confronted with problems such as digital class relations, digital individualism, digital surveillance, digital authoritarianism, algorithmic politics, online filter bubbles, the digital culture industry, digital tabloids, influencer capitalism, digital acceleration, and online fake news.



A critical theory of the digital public sphere should avoid digital defeatism and digital Luddism. Digital technologies interact with society. The contradictions of society are expressed in them. A digital public sphere is not simply a democratisation of the Internet, but must go hand in hand with a strengthening of democracy in the economy, politics, and culture. There are already non-capitalist forms of the economy today. In the field of the media, public service media play an important role alongside alternative media. This chapter has pointed out that the development of a public service Internet is a democratic alternative to the capitalist Internet and digital capitalism.

Right-wing and far-right forces have frequently attacked public broadcasting in recent years. In Switzerland, a referendum on the abolition of broadcasting fees was held in 2018 as a result of an initiative by the neoliberal Jungfreisinnigen. In Austria, the Freedom Party (FPÖ), when it was part of a coalition government (2017–2019), wanted to replace the licence fee with tax funding for the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF), which would have caused the public service broadcaster to lose its independence. In Britain, the right-wing government of Boris Johnson wants to decriminalise the non-payment of licence fees, which could lead to the end of the BBC. Johnson and his supporters have repeatedly criticised the BBC as being far removed from the interests of the people and a manifestation of an urban liberal elite in London that has disregarded the majority will of the people after a Brexit. The Alternative for Germany (AfD)'s media spokesperson Martin E. Renner formulates the criticism of Germany's public service broadcasters ARD and ZDF as follows:

The availability of information, broadcasts and programmes is in principle almost unlimited due to digitalisation. Conversely, everyone has the opportunity to freely disseminate information and opinions via social media or their own platforms. [...] Through the state-guaranteed compulsory contributions, which add up to the unbelievable amount of around 8 billion euros per year, the state organises a market power in the media sector and thus intervenes in competition and indirectly in the freedom of information. [...] Therefore, in order to adapt the offer of the existing public broadcasters to the wishes and needs of their users, all that is needed is the complete abolition of the compulsory fees. [...] It is thus to be casually re-educated in the sense of the 'political correctness' defined by them. At present, it is all about propagating 'diversity' and conjuring up the beautiful, ideal world of multi-culturalism.<sup>9</sup>

The AfD wants a purely private, profit-oriented media system. Public service media's democratic and educational remit is dismissed as "political correctness". The AfD wants a private sector, *völkisch* broadcasting system and a capitalist-*völkisch* Internet.

These right-wing attacks on public service broadcasting have not yet been successful. In the Coronavirus crisis, public service media have reached a new heyday, as the population considers the public service combination of information, education, and entertainment to be immeasurable, especially in times of crisis. While before the start of the coronavirus crisis on 25 February 2020, the RTL soap opera *Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten* was the most watched German TV programme among 14–49 year-olds with 1.5 million viewers and a market share of 20.2 per cent,<sup>10</sup> among the same group of viewers on 29 March, the ARD news programme *Tagesschau* had the highest reach with an audience share of 28.2 per cent and 3.2 million viewers.<sup>11</sup> Among the total audience aged 3 and over, the *Tagesschau* even achieved 11 million viewers and an audience share of 29.2 per cent.<sup>12</sup> Special programmes on the crisis on ARD and ZDF were also particularly popular. On 25 February, by comparison, just under 4.9 million people watched the *Tagesschau*.<sup>13</sup>

Independent, critical, non-commercial public service media are an expression of the democratic public sphere. A public service Internet is a dimension of the democratisation of digitalisation.

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## Notes

1 Translated from German:

Wir fassen Öffentlichkeit (1) als ein spezifisches Kommunikationssystem, das sich gegenüber anderen Sozialsystemen abgrenzt. Das System konstituiert sich auf der Basis des Austauschs von Informationen und Meinungen. Personen, Gruppen und Institutionen bringen bestimmte Themen auf und äußern Meinungen zu den Themen. Denkt man bei dem Begriff Diskussion nicht unbedingt an akademische Veranstaltungen – denn öffentliche Kommunikation schließt demagogische Überzeugungskommunikation ebenso ein wie ein rationales Abwägen von Argumenten – kann man Öffentlichkeit als ein Diskussionsystems bezeichnen. [...] Die Besonderheit des Kommunikationssystems Öffentlichkeit ergibt sich (2) daraus, daß alle Mitglieder einer Gesellschaft teilnehmen dürfen, das Publikum ist grundsätzlich ‚unabgeschlossen‘, die Grenze des Systems ist offen.

2 Translated from German: "Kneipen, Kaffeehäuser und Salons".

3 On the topicality of Marcuse's concept of technological rationality in digital capitalism, see Fuchs (2019a).

- 4 See for example, Jenkins (2008). A critique of Jenkins' works and similar approaches can be found in Fuchs (2017, 2019b, Chapters 3, 5, 8).
- 5 Siehe <https://platform.coop/>, <https://ioo.coop/directory/>, <http://cultural.coop/>.
- 6 Data source: <https://www.forbes.com/global2000/list>, accessed on 14 April 2021.
- 7 Data source: <https://www.alexa.com/topsites>, accessed on 14 April 2021.
- 8 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/>, accessed on 27 March 2021.
- 9 Data source: [https://www.dwld.de/magazin/68116/afd\\_ohne\\_den\\_rundfunkbeitrag\\_waere\\_alles\\_besser/page\\_1.html](https://www.dwld.de/magazin/68116/afd_ohne_den_rundfunkbeitrag_waere_alles_besser/page_1.html), accessed on 14 April 2021. Translated from German:

Die Verfügbarkeit von Informationen, Sendungen und Programmen ist durch die Digitalisierung prinzipiell nahezu unbegrenzt. Umgekehrt besteht die Möglichkeit für jedermann über socialmedia oder eigene Plattformen Informationen und Meinungen frei zu verbreiten. [...] durch die staatlich garantierten Zwangsbeiträge, die sich auf die unglaubliche Höhe von rund 8 Milliarden Euro pro Jahr aufsummieren, organisiert der Staat eine Marktmacht im Mediensektor und greift so in den Wettbewerb und indirekt in die Informationsfreiheit ein. [...] Um das Angebot der bestehenden öffentlich-rechtlichen Sender den Wünschen und Bedürfnissen ihrer Nutzer anzupassen, bedarf es daher nur der vollständigen Abschaffung der Zwangsgebühren. [...] Es soll so beiläufig umerzogen werden im Sinne der von ihnen definierten 'political correctness'. Aktuell geht es darum, 'Diversität' zu propagieren und die schöne heile Welt des Multi-Kulturalismus zu beschwören.

- 10 Data source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200226090231/https://www.dwld.de/zahlenzentrale/>, accessed on 18 April 2020.
- 11 Data source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200330171813/https://www.dwld.de/zahlenzentrale/>, accessed on 18 April 2020.
- 12 Data source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200330171813/https://www.dwld.de/zahlenzentrale/>, accessed on 18 April 2020.
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