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CHAPTER 5

Social Media Effects: Hijacking Democracy and Civility in Civic Engagement

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Computer-mediated communication, a novel and emerging area just a few decades ago, has evolved from an academic collaboration tool to what is commonly referred to as new and social media. New and social media have been touted as an equalizer for disenfranchised individuals to participate or contribute in civic engagement and to foster democratic ideals. However, the current state of social media and networking sites leave individuals to conclude that these media platforms may be holding democracy hostage instead of leading to the free and equal democratic ideals they were believed to support. Consequently, this chapter emphasizes that it is imperative to figure out a way to maintain sensible dialogues that promote democratic principles.

New and social media are hailed as vehicles for providing a voice to the voiceless. They are also viewed as a way to overcome state-controlled media and content (Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler, 2011) especially in the

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developing world (Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler, 2011). However, social media platforms are also increasingly being used as a means for empowering disruptive voices, messages, or ideologies (e.g., xenophobia, neo-Nazism, anti-immigration/globalization, cultural homogeneity, etc.) (Cook, Waugh, Abdipanah, Hashemi, & Rahman, 2014; Gleason, 2013). The ability of a person or group to overstate an agenda and dominate the conversation is easily accomplished on social media such as Twitter. This is because social media do not subscribe to the same established journalistic rules of vetting and reporting news. Furthermore, the size of a group or an organization pushing a particular message no longer matters.

This chapter explores how social media have become a platform for fake news and propaganda to influence certain audiences toward a particular way of thinking. Consequently, social media outlets and people who consume information through them are putting pressure on the idea of democracy such that democratic societies as we know them may cease to exist. Along this line, this chapter explores how Twitter and Facebook in particular are used in a manner that creates chaos within regions and have arguably become an authoritative vehicle for persuasion (Cook et al., 2014; Waters & Williams, 2011). The capacity to morph or create multiplier effects suggest that social media messages, such as tweets and retweets of a few minority influencers, can become something considerably larger in terms of support of a person or a particular policy (Cook et al., 2014; Wilson, 2011). Therefore, this chapter incorporates specific examples and analogies from events such as the Brexit vote and US elections, along with subsequent tweets by the president of the United States.

New and Social Media

New and Social media provide information for individuals in certain networks while they also create multiplier effects as those same individuals attempt to reach others in their networks. Multiplier effects such as these that occur through social media can go on in perpetuity. For instance, it was noted that in 2010 that individuals between 8 and 18 years of age were exposed to a daily average of 10.45 hours of various media technology (see Dahl & Newkirk, 2010). However, recently people have been exposed and engaged in what has been termed as a *mass-self communication* (Castells, 2013) that is embedded within ubiquitous computing (Moffitt, 2016). *Ubiquitous computing* is also known as the third wave of computers, in which hand-held devices with Internet wireless technology

are widespread and highly accessible. In essence, this dynamic constitutes social media that readily put information and messages in the hands of individuals at a speed never seen before. Therefore, the result is an evolution of electronic communication technology (Castells, 2013). This evolution is stimulating new patterns of production, reception, content, and circulation, allowing for new forms of engagement through participation, production, and consumption. Consequently, communication is no longer confined by geographical boundaries, but rather globalized to the extent that it is linked to the "ideology of worldwide communication" (Mattelart, 2002, p. 591). In other words, social media enable power where an online community or the virtual world has become a dialectical space. It is within this space that people can initiate or perform roles as producers of content, broadcasters, audiences, and political actors (Castells, 2013).

Social Media and Political Discourse

The political landscape has been transformed by new and social media. This transformation has resulted in an increased rise of populism around the world. Subsequently, the active role of the audience as made possible by social media has become a great opportunity for populist actors to spread their political messages or agendas (Moffitt, 2016). The proliferation of populism through media is not new. Historically in Europe, the populist radical-right parties (PRRPs) and actors have been using media (e.g., TV, radio, print press) as platforms for their messages since World War II (Mudde, 2013). However, new and social media reache a larger audience with political content via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Weibo (Moffitt, 2016). This audience can now be reached at greater speeds and within a short time span (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2013).

The role of new and social media is central to the populism movement because it represents political strategies in novel and exciting forms (Mudde, 2007, 2013; Moffitt, 2016). In this vein, social networks are better suited as a method of creating social webs designed to facilitate the diffusion of desired behavior among groups of people (i.e., Centola & Christakis, 2014). However, the nature of social media in a political discourse must be conceptualized within the context of democracy theory. For the most part, *democratic theory* subscribes to the idea of human involvement in non-activist decision making, otherwise referred to as *participatory democracy* (Moote, McClaran, & Chickering, 1997). At the

core of participatory democracy theory is the role of the public or citizens in rational evaluations of the pros and cons of an issue. This is especially the case when individuals are participating in decision making or offering rewards (Kweit & Kweit, 1987; Moote et al., 1997). However, with the introduction of social media, affected people are encouraged to voice their opinions even though they do not necessarily engage in the democratic process. More specifically, the coherent discussion of ideas has been substituted with the spread of fragmented ideas, resulting in the spread of populism (Wirth et al., 2016). To this end, social media in political discourse are rife with a *pathological* form of democracy (Betz, 1994; Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017). Similarly, although the spread of populism extends beyond Westernized societies, Mudde (2007) concurs that populism has become mainstream in Western democratic politics.

Social Media Impact on Voting Turnout

Bond et al. (2012) found that online political mobilization messages distributed via individual self-expressions and shared through personal social networks (i.e., Facebook or Twitter) lead to self-guided information seeking and, perhaps, self-serving behavior. Consequently, these messages subsequently impact voting turnout behavior. Indeed, the study indicates the powerful effect of online political mobilization. Furthermore, the authors conducted a randomized controlled trial with all users who accessed the Facebook website on 2 November 2010, the day of the US congressional elections. Users were then randomly assigned to a "social message" group ($N = 60{,}055{,}176$), an "informational message" group ($N = 611{,}044$), or a control group ($N = 613{,}096$). The findings suggest that when political mobilizing messages are disseminated by close friends in a given personal social network, the influence is four times more on the total number of validated voters mobilized compared to the informational message group and control group. In other words, social networks have been and continue to be used to impact individuals' voting turnout behavior (i.e., Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). Hence, sharing messages in social networks impacts an individual's emotions, which ultimately results in actual real-world actions. This finding serves to rule out any naïve understanding of social networks as a mere way of contacting "old friends" and family members or in positioning commercial brands.

Populism the Symbolic Frontier

Although there exists haphazard scholarly analysis of populism as an ideology, strategy, discourse, or political logic, Moffitt (2016) asserts that the best way to conceptualize it is as a political strategy. This strategy entails "the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government to everyday life" (Moffitt, 2016, p. 38). Furthermore, within this dynamic, societies are politically polarized in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", "Us" versus "They", or "citizens" versus "immigrants". The official political performance reflects people's general will to forcefully reflect their sovereignty. Consequently, the way in which these groups are formed is through *the unsatisfied demand* as the minimal unit of political social analysis. This unsatisfied demand, along with other unsatisfied needs, becomes a springboard for people to identify a common antagonist/enemy believed to be the perpetrator even if this entails the use of fake news.

Therefore, the more people can dissociate themselves from the technocratic style of "politics as usual", the better their appeal (Disch, 2012; Saward, 2010; Severs, 2010). For example, President Donald Trump said during his 2016 presidential campaign that he likes poor and uneducated Americans more than the rich. Subsequently, this situation evinces populist leaders' performance based on pretending to be "outsiders" in mainstream politics to give perceived distance between their actual experiences as the "elite". Therefore, populism creates a symbolic frontier among social groups in a way that hegemony is reinvented as a government of the people's will (Wirth et al., 2016). One way this occurs is through the acceptance of a leader who fosters anti-immigrant discourse in the EU and the US, two nation-states where immigrants are treated as outsiders.

Polarized Political Groups Influencing Human Behavior

The use of social media platforms allows people to share messages with a larger audience in a way that was not previously possible. All this sharing can now be accomplished without running the risk of censorship, a common barrier of traditional media outlets. On social media there are active communities (e.g., right wing, racist, neo-Nazi) that seek to disseminate hate messages to their members and distribute propaganda to recruit new

membership. These groups rely on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to communicate (O'Callaghan et al., 2013). Consequently, messages sent via social media will continue to spread through followers to others. Reciprocation of messages occurs in the same manner.

Perhaps a significant contribution of social media to any ideological or political movement, such as populism, lies in the fact that it helps to influence users' behavior. An attempt to influence behavior must not only focus on the informational effect, but also on the effect the message will have on the recipients. Additionally, it must increase the likelihood of the various behaviors the message will spur as it transmits from person to person through the social network. This variation is based upon online mobilization as messages spread through strong-tie networks existing offline and in online arenas (Bond et al., 2012).

Some research has shown that the organization of community groups online is decentralized, while other research has found that some groups exhibit a more centralized disposition (Chau & Xu, 2007; O'Callaghan et al., 2013). Nevertheless their construction, the purpose of using new media to further any ideology is to mobilize groups. This includes, but is not limited to, furthing the populist movment. This mobilization was found to be the case in more extremist groups investigated in a conservative movement in the US (Blee & Creasap, 2010; Bond et al., 2012). Additionally, Bond et al. (2012) reported that online messages influenced political self-expression and information seeking, along with individual voting behavior. Moreover, online messages influenced not only those who received the messages, but also their friends and friends of friends (Bond et al., 2012). This was especially true when there was a strong tie or close friend relationship between individuals.

The Impacts of Social Media in Political Elections

The story of the last two US presidential campaigns focuses on the use of social media. However, each candidate used social media for different reasons and in order to accomplish different goals. The 2008 election focused on disseminating campaign-relevant information based on facts, while the 2016 election focused on propaganda through the deployment of fake news and bots. The research indicated that the election of President Obama brought about an increase in the surge of the white nationalist movement. Specifically, the study showed that the day after Obama was elected president occurred the biggest single increase in membership of

Stormfront (a White nationalist organization) and that Trump rode the wave to become president in 2016 (Hinck, 2018; Stephens-Davidowitz & Pinker, 2017). Using social media as his persuasive tool, Trump's campaign imbued anger and hyper-partisanship by advocating policies or messages that called for isolation from the world and the closing of the border to establish an immigration policy.

According to Persily (2017), social media were used in a way to upset established paradigms on how to run and win elections to the extent that President Trump's campaign broke established norms of politics. However, President Trump and the 2016 election is not the only occurance of populist nationalism that appears to thrive on social media. Other examples include the rise of the Five Star Movement in Italy, the pirate party in Iceland, and the keyboard army of President Duterte in the Philippines. Furthermore, in Europe the successful Brexit referendum revealed that supporters were seven times more active than their opponents on Twitter and five times more active on Instagram (Persily, 2017).

Fanaticism and Viral Nature of Social Media

It is important to understand what make social media so powerful as a communication tool. The legacy of traditional media as gatekeepers or campaign mediators is declining in terms of influence and power, with no alternative institutions to fill the void. More importantly, President Trump taped into this void by excessively using social media and Twitter. It was noted that from August 2015 to election day there were more than a billion tweets regarding the presidential election (Twitter.com, 2016; Persily, 2017). Furthermore, Trump's followers on the platform outnumbered Clinton's followers by 33% (CBSNews, 2016). Subsequently, every tweet from Trump or his allies was further retweeted by his loyal followers and supporters. Particularly, it was found that in mid-2016, Trump's tweets were retweeted three times as much as Clinton's, while Trump's Facebook post were re-shared five times more (Journalism.org, 2016; Persily, 2017). Persily (2017) also discovered that despite much lower advertising budgets or spending overall, the Trump campaign spent more on Facebook than the Clinton campaign.

Perhaps the viral nature of information on social media gives it power. This may be because messages (e.g., political) in social networks influence users' emotions, making social media messages effective tools of persuasion (Kramer et al., 2014). The ability to deliver both real and junk

news (i.e., propaganda, misinformation) makes the media platform potent. Malicious activities such as harassment, hate speech, and spamming are just a few of the negative ways social media are being used (Howard, Bolsover, Kollanyi, Bradshaw, & Neudert, 2017). Bots on social media platforms can quickly send messages and replicate themselves in a way where the messages appear as if sent by a human being. *Social media bots* are automated accounts that are set up to act as if an actual person is using them. Bots are often used for propagating propaganda from both within and outside the country. Moreover, the notion of *sock puppetry* denotes that large followings via social media platforms can be easily gained for an insignificant price.

Therefore, social media provide dangerous ways of spreading junk news within social networks comprised of friends and family. Prior research found that social media favor sensationalist content, regardless of whether the message was fact-checked or not (McCoy, 2016; Vicario et al., 2016). Notwithstanding, when misinformation is combined with automation such as bots, then social media become a tool for computational propaganda (Howard et al., 2017; Kümpel, Karnowski, & Keyling, 2015). Cambridge Analytica (part of Trump's social media digital strategy) claimed that it targeted 13.5 million voters in 16 battleground states to discover hidden Trump supporters that polls had ignored. Also, Cambridge Analytica targeted Clinton supporters (e.g. white liberals, young women, and African Americans) with messages aimed to reduce turnout among those groups (Persily, 2017).

Political Polarization and Lack of Censorship

Social media offer a direct connection to people and thus allows for the spread of fragmented ideas such as populism to circumvent journalistic gatekeepers. In this way populists can present uncontested or unvetted ideas directly to their audience and articulate their ideology (Engesser et al., 2017). Hence, the rise of new media and political polarization creates a binary political strategy to increase political participation and voting turnout among individuals who see themselves as victims, or powerless, in the democratic process. Notwithstanding, the lack of control and censorship in new and social media has become a niche for extremist groups such as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or neo-Nazis to spread their ideology. It is within this landscape that traditional media are forced to line up with polarized content in new media in order to keep their audience, while

users are caught in the middle or forced to take a side. This dilemma, however, is the antithesis of the tenets of participative democracy (Moote et al., 1997). More importantly, traditional media are reinventing what is defined as news to the extent that they are actively mining social media for what they believe their audience wants to view.

The fact remains that social media platforms have become fertile ground for fake news and propaganda as evidenced in the 2016 US presidential election. BuzzFeed found that false election stories from hoax sites and hyper-partisan blogs generated more engagement than content from real news sites during the last three months of the election and post-election. Users shared false stories such as that Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump and/or that Hillary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS. These stories and others were shared (e.g. retweeted) hundreds of thousands of times. More importantly, another report found that users were not interested in any news that disagreed or deviated from their accepted premises (PBS Newshour, 2016a). Subsequently, people continued to actively seek and present false information as long as it supported their respective viewpoints.

Furthermore, any group can lend its Twitter support to a particular cause or person such that the control of an ideology or principle can gain an allegiance for a price (Ashton, 2013; Cook et al., 2014). Similarly, social media are increasingly being used by individuals who want to profit based on the number of clicks. In order to do this, they deliberately spread false and fake news to enrich themselves. Persily (2017) investigated the profit motive of social media users residing both inside and outside (i.e., Macedonia) the US. These users reported that publishing pro-Trump and anti-Clinton stories on about 140 websites dealing with US politics could earn them a fortune. One Trump supporter commented that he would have been willing to promote Ms. Clinton and smear Trump if the tactic was profitable. However, he discovered that similar Trump supporters were more fanatical and/or emotionally connected to their candidate than Clinton's supporters (McCoy, 2016). Furthermore, he stated that Trump supporters were more likely to believe anything when compared to Clinton's supporters. This is because demographically Trump supporters are less educated, open to deep-seated beliefs, and willing to accept conspiracy theories as truth (Persily, 2017; Peters, 2017; Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2017).

Social Media, Politics, and Propaganda

Twitter, for example, has increasingly been used in political elections of nation-states and in the spread of ideologies such as displayed in the Brexit movement and the 2016 US presidential election (PBS Newshour, 2016b). Additionally, web-based botnets represent a significant number of Twitter traffic (Boshmaf, Muslukhov, Beznosov, & Ripeanu, 2011; Cook et al., 2014). To this end, propaganda and misinformation appear to be the norm in social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. *Social media bots* (i.e., botnets, bots) are designed to manipulate the passage, transfer, and volume of the social narrative, which makes them ideal for the spread of homogeneity, as opposed to diversity, within their message. This inherent functionality is why bots are frequently used to spread beliefs (e.g., populism) and computational propaganda. Message distribution via botnets is popular due to the fanaticism of select users who demonstrate an insatiable desire to consume and redistribute information despite the source. Many of these messages carry divisive narratives that tend to transform civic engagement into dichotomies, pitting one group of people against another without allowing for consensus or compromise. Furthermore, fake news websites and bots attract traffic and drive engagement. Collectively, they aim to influence conversations and demobilize opposition through false support (Howard et al., 2017).

The size of a group or an organization does not necessarily have to reflect the level of influence delivered through social media. Twitter has been used in a manner that can create both stability and chaos within regions. Twitter has also arguably become an authoritative vehicle for persuasion (Cook et al., 2014; Waters & Williams, 2011). For instance, the Pizzagate conspiracy theory, where Michael Flynn Jr. (the son of fired National Security Agency director Michael Flynn) tweeted a false story about Hilary Clinton and her campaign manager being involved in a child sex ring. Unfortunately, the tweet led to a man who believed the theory entering the pizza parlor mentioned in the tweet with a rifle and firing shots before being arrested (Persily, 2017). Moreover, Twitter can greatly influence two-party dominated elections such as those in the US, UK and Australia, where prominence is sited on the support for one political leader over another (Cook et al., 2014). For example, it has been reported that tweets for Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump by party loyalists using sock puppetry or bots at one point stood at 20% and 33%, respectively (PBS Newshour, 2016b). Similar results were found in the 2013 Australian

federal elections, where large numbers of fake Twitter followers were found for both the incumbent prime minister and the leader of the opposition (Butt & Hounslow, 2013; Cook et al., 2014).

Prior to the Brexit vote, some of the messages tweeted to sway votes included "We are British not Europeans", "Immigrants are terrorists", and "Immigrants have taken away our jobs". Additionally, Donald Trump's 2016 campaign slogan "Make America Great Again", was coupled with Twitter messages referring to Mexicans as rapists, Muslims as Islamic terrorists, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) agreement as the worst trade policy ever. In all cases, the opposition always touted the supporters of such ideologies as a basket of deplorables. Unfortunately however, these extreme viewpoints are now the norm, reality in a post-truth world. New scientific evidence attributes this not to the fact that politicians are more crooked than before, but rather that facts are futile. In other words, it is not that particular negative beliefs are more popular than positive beliefs, but that followers at times become more aggressive at distributing their views over other groups. More importantly, misinformation through social media, once limited to select viewers, has become shareable to all (Peters, 2017). For example, ideological extremism, misinformation, and the intention to persuade readers to respect or hate a candidate/policy based on emotional appeals through social media were reported in Michigan during periods leading to the 2016 USA presidential election. This fake news outperformed professional real news, substantiating the claim that truth is relative and based upon a particular political stance and/or belief system (Howard et al., 2017).

Implications

In social media, trending, tweeting, and retweeting are key metrics, even though the metrics can be manipulated, bought, or faked to create the impression that a particular issue represents the opinions of the majority. The reality though is that these messages are designed to appear as truth. Thus, political agendas such as populist ideologies, among others, can be manipulated as original or authentic when in fact this is not the case. Quite often, crazy ideas, lies, and conspiracy theories spread more rapidly than facts through social media. Subsequently, by the time information is fact-checked, the damage is already done and remains irreversible (Howard et al., 2017; McCoy, 2016; Persily, 2017; Peters, 2017). Therefore, it becomes difficult to engage in a democratic process where everyone can

deliberate and consider all points of view. Moreover, the implication for the socio-cultural perspective may be greater especially when hatred, ethnocentrism, and separatism philosophies become the norm, as both the Brexit and the 2016 US elections indicate. The role that social media plays in hijacking democracy is clear in these elections, as the winners in both cases were the minority. For example, President Trump was elected based on the Electoral College vote, when in fact he lost the popular vote by 3 million votes.

User Anonymity and Authenticity

With social media, authenticity and trustworthiness of information, along with a sender's identity, are hard to discern (Engesser et al., 2017). Furthermore, the anonymity facilitated in social media contributes to phony online personas that can be created by users or even botnets. According to PBS NewsHour (2016b), bots can be purchased very cheaply (Ashton, 2013), and as a result, they become a critical tool to influence political movement and manipulate metrics. Furthermore, it is hard to verify messages that bots distribute versus messages from a real person. Also, bots contribute to fake tweets, since they are soley designed to sway opinions (i.e., slacktivism) (Cook et al., 2014; PBS NewsHour, 2016b). The danger, however, is that given a significant number of demographics (i.e., millennials) get their news through social media platforms and often from friends, family members, and acquaintances (e.g., social media influencers), they are less likely to do due diligence in questioning the authenticity of messages via tweets, retweets or Facebook postings. The sheer number of followers of a particular message is likely to convince individuals of the need to subscribe to similar beliefs and ideologies being promulgated by a sender even when such ideas may be false or run contrary to an individual's beliefs or values. This approach to information or message dissemination is contrary to what democracy theory of participation is proposed to accomplish in terms of not functioning or serving activism, as discussed previously. Specifically, the populists attack opponents or blame the elite for whatever problems they see in the democratic process (Engesser et al., 2017).

Message Volume

By Twitter's own estimation in 2013 there were roughly 10.75 million non-genuine Twitter accounts (D'Yonfro, 2013) in the form of fake

followers, along with accounts associated with individuals with numerous personas (Yarow, 2013). The number of messages posted on Facebook or tweeted over Twitter also makes it impossible to censor or discern real news from fake news (PBS, 2016a November). As a matter of fact, it was reported that fake news such as the claim that Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump and that Hilary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS received a significant level of attention or engagement when compared to real news by the *New York Times* during the 2016 US presidential election (PBS Newshour, 2016a). When a person uses multiple online personas constructed to look like an authentic identity (i.e., sock puppetry) (Cook et al., 2014), it begs the question of motive. The practice of sock puppetry has one underlying commonality, to self-promote a particular cause. The practice has been linked to online business promotions (Streitfield, 2012), political support (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011), and terrorist coercion (Conway, 2012). In regard to terrorist coercion, for instance, the ISIS terrorist group has been linked to setting up thousands of fake Twitter accounts to recruit individuals (PBS Newshour, 2016a).

As new and social media are here to stay, so is the idea of fake news or computational propaganda. The challenge, however, is that with social media it is hard to maintain a sensible and cordial dialogue, which is critical to democracy. One of the challenges with early social networks was that in some cases only like-minded individuals were creating and joining online communities. However, social media are now extending the reach of a few like-minded individuals in a way to shape policy for societies and nations as a whole. For now, populist ideology, the alt-right, alt-truth, and the rest are prevalent. What comes next no one knows. However, if the past is indicative of the present, the future is more likely to be far worse. Not only was the alt-right group able to endorse both President Trump and Brexit, but it has been able to shift public rhetoric from embracing diversity to a homogenous society where, for example, a country rooted in immigrants is closing doors on immigration, leading the way to an anti-immigrant stance. Events following the 2016 election (e.g., the Charlottesville, VA, riots) have intensified conflicts and set back race relations in the US. However, while the president had the opportunity to calm the public, he responded late, with a response that worsened the situation. Similar criticisms were given in regard to President Trump's response to the COVID-19 pandemic large-scale outbreak accross the US. Another hot political issue surrounded the separation of children from parents who illegally cross the US border from Mexico. However, instead of finding a

constructive solution, the current administration, along with President Trump, categorized the problem as simply enforcing the previous administration's policy. This justification was given despite evidence that there was no such policy from either the Bush or the Obama administrations (Robertson, 2018). As a matter of fact, some states and former US attorney generals from both the Bush and Obama administrations have linked child-parent border separations to the current US attorney general's (i.e., Jeff Session's) announcement of a *zero-tolerance* policy in April 2018. The *zero-tolerance* policy has resulted in around 2000 children being separated from their parents within a six-week period (ALM Media, 2018). However, and despite the policy, the current whereabouts of these children remain unknown.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that it is imperative to figure out a way to maintain sensible dialogues that promote democratic principles. However, this must be done not just on Twitter or social media, but in society at large by bridging the gap between proponents and opponents of diverse political parties on certain political ideologies. However, in order for this to succeed, individual citizens will need to confront their own confirmation biases. All parties must demonstrate a willingness to seek opinions that extend beyond their individually held beliefs and ideologies (Rothwell, 2017). One way of doing this is to conscientiously seek disconfirming information about issues and policies, to engage people in constructive dialogue, and to listen to the views of individuals a policy might affect. This is especially true when it comes to individuals who may have different opinions, cultures, and/or perspectives. Otherwise, the principle or foundation upon which democracy exists via participatory democracy or inclusive participation as it is now known may cease to exist. This appears to be the case when social media facilitation of propaganda is coined as genuine and truthful information. At the same time, what counts as news and foundations for ethics in news (due to mass media mediation) is already under siege, as traditional news media have lost the battle concerning their roles as mediators of facts and gatekeepers of truth.

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