Deliberative Democracy in the Networked Public Sphere:

Using Social Media to Talk Politics

Russell William Hansen

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2018

Committee:

Emily Ignacio

Amos Nascimento

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Science

University of Washington

Abstract

Deliberative Democracy in the Networked Public Sphere:

Using Social Media to Talk Politics

Russell William Hansen

Chairs of the Supervisory Committee:

Emily Ignacio

Amos Nascimento

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

Online discussions about politics are commonplace, and could play a large role in the deliberative process that is crucial to the healthy functioning of democracy. Assailed as inferior, dysfunctional, and distracting, these discussions are made possible by the invention and adoption of new information communication technologies, and questions often arise regarding how the uses of such technologies affect the way in which political deliberation is undertaken. I look at these questions through the lens of public sphere theory, focusing on how political discussion on social media platforms such as Reddit and Facebook adheres to the norms of ideal democratic deliberation. I advocate for the development of new methods which take into consideration the complexity of overlapping networks of digital communication technologies.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis chairs, Emily Ignacio and Amos Nascimento, for their tireless effort and constant support in helping me to write this thesis. They have been invaluable for encouraging my intellectual development, and I cannot imagine having completed this thesis without their assistance. In addition, Larry Knopp offered chapter-by-chapter feedback throughout the development of this document, for which I am very grateful. Many of the ideas in this thesis were developed through graduate seminars taught by faculty members in the University of Washington's Department of Communication, including Katy Pearce, Kirsten Foot, and Lance Bennett. I wanted to thank them for their instruction and guidance as I wrestled with the issues addressed in this work. Finally, Jamie Mayerfeld and Bill Talbott from the Departments of Political Science and Philosophy, respectively, were enormous influences on my thinking about these matters.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Each day, it becomes increasingly apparent that social media use and presence are pervasive facets of everyday life for a growing percentage of the American public. As of Nov. 2016, 69% of American adults used at least one social media site, with Facebook easily claiming dominance over other industry giants such as Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2017). From uploading photo albums to sharing web content, commenting on a friend's status update to organizing and joining events, Facebook plays host to a wide spectrum of social interactions. Naturally, one would also expect political discussion to occur on a platform such as Facebook given the breadth of its content. Furthermore, recent events and reports have incited public scrutiny of Facebook and other social media platforms for the role they may have played during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum (so-called "Brexit"). Microtargeting and narrowcasting of political content through social media is almost undeniably a major feature of our modern democratic environment (Howard, 2005, p. 6). In addition, the proliferation of information (and disinformation) in the digital age involves a new division of labor, in which consumers shoulder much of the burden of distributing content. We are all increasingly implicated in the political environment we inhabit due in large part to these new socio-technical configurations.

With this background in mind, it is important to consider the ways in which online political discussion might play a crucial part in the success or failure of our democratic processes. We've all seen it, regardless of our participatory preferences: impassioned and protracted arguments on social media between friends, family, and acquaintances about policy decisions, elections, and political scandals. It is common parlance to lament the days when that kind of discussion was much more sane, good-natured, and productive. What people are getting

at when they express such sentiments can be thought of as the apparently worsening failure to observe certain values that guide discussion about those decisions in public life which affect us. Certainly, nostalgia is a likely culprit for some of these sentiments. However, I believe that there is something deeper being expressed here. What people are getting at when they say such things is perhaps that a kind of civil discourse has become scarce, and that the decline of thoughtful, honest political discussion needs to be addressed. Furthermore, as Robert Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk suggest, people "…have also become more cynical about the value of democracy as a political system, less hopeful that anything they do might influence public policy" (p. 11, 2016). Worse than simply losing faith, evidence shows that younger generations have begun to favor authoritarian attitudes over democratic ideals (Foa & Mounk, 2016). What are we to make of such a grim situation?

The solution, I suspect, is multifaceted and demanding, but not beyond our reach. It requires a systematic and fundamentally interdisciplinary approach to investigating a number of interwoven phenomena, including but not limited to political discussion of all sorts, new developments in technology, and constantly evolving socio-cultural influences that shape our attitudes towards the relationship between the two. This is complicated by the fact that social scientific research itself is changing. In the world of big data, new approaches are needed that can account for both the sheer quantity of data as well as the dynamic nature of its production, often combining traditional (quantitative and qualitative alike) and computational methods, the latter referring to computer-aided collection, preprocessing, and analysis of data (Freelon, 2015).

This thesis considers the ways in which online political discussion is related to the overall functioning of democracy in the United States. It engages concerns for the health of our democracy through the lens of Public Sphere Theory, modified as necessary to accommodate the

dynamic socio-technical assemblages of networked digital media, and more specifically, social networking and social media platforms. It makes three central arguments: (1) that despite the messiness of the present media infrastructure, empirical research on the networked public sphere is valuable (2) that such research requires novel methodological approaches that account for different forms of power/knowledge and new logics of (re)production, (re)distribution, and consumption of information and (3) that there is an important difference between the empirical existence and functioning of public(s) and a normative political ideal, and that studying both in relation to one another has worth for health of democracy. Through the careful study of online public discussions regarding political issues which affect us all, we can come to understand the degree to which the decisions we make in such spaces coincide with successes and failures at the level of electoral politics.

Some of the principle research questions addressed in this study include: What properties of social media platforms are predictors of good deliberation (observation of deliberative norms)? What properties of platforms are predictors of bad deliberation (failure to observe norms)? Does identifiability of participation affect the quality of deliberation? How are deliberative norms themselves discussed and enforced in these spaces? These questions are framed so as to be compatible with an affordances perspective on technology: namely, that many of the most interesting and generalizable aspects of technology lie somewhere between the properties of the technology itself and the outcomes that result from its use (Evans, Pearce, Vitak, & Treem, 2016). Affordances such as anonymity, persistence, and visibility have been explicated in works such as Treem & Leonardi (2013) and Evans et al. (2016). Thus, the aim is not simply to describe the platforms being studied, but indeed the ways in which aspects of those platforms facilitate certain uses. These uses, I argue, are fundamental for thinking about how

political discussion happens more generally in computer mediated environments. Furthermore, these questions are assessed in the greater context of a stressed democracy—one characterized by precarity, disinformation, and extraordinary disparities in representation. The thesis concludes with suggestions for further applications and developments of the constellation of methods employed.

This thesis has two major components: (1) a theory section, in which Public Sphere Theory is discussed in the context of the ever-changing technological environment of information communication technologies (ICTs) and the present political climate; and (2) empirical research, in which quantitative content analysis and discourse analysis are employed to study public spheres and the norms which in part define them as such. The theory section itself proceeds in three parts. In the second chapter, I show how Public Sphere Theory operates at the intersections of the disciplines of Communication, Political Sociology, and Philosophy and contains both descriptive and normative dimensions. I suggest that it can be used to explain how publics in deliberative democracies effect political change through communicative action and why their decisions *ought* to confer or deny legitimacy to certain governing bodies. I draw heavily from the work of philosopher Jurgen Habermas, who introduced the modern concept of the public sphere to the world with his 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. In addition, I discuss the work of two major critics of the public sphere ideal, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner. In the third chapter, I describe the present situation concerning information communication technologies and digital media networks, paying special attention to the different forms of power, old and new, that compete, reinforce, and reproduce one another in these online spaces. This chapter also describes in further detail the affordances perspective mentioned above and how it relates to conceptions of technology, especially concerning social

science research. Finally, in chapter four, I take a broader look at the state of western democracy and consider the prospects for a genuinely deliberative form of democracy going forward and in the face of significant adversity. This chapter concludes with an optimistic assessment of the potential for computer mediated communication to facilitate effective political discourse. The overarching question provoked by these theoretical considerations is duly summarized by Thomas McCarthy's introduction to the English translation of Habermas' seminal work (cited above): "When the classical model of the public sphere is no longer socio-politically feasible, the question becomes: can the public sphere be effectively reconstituted under radically different socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions?" (1991, p. xii). To this list of conditions, the following work contributes the term "technological."

Chapter five discusses the empirical research, intended to show how such reconstitution is going, so to speak, by looking at political discussion as it occurs in online spaces. It employs a mixed-methods approach, allowing for different ways of knowing to interact and inform one another. Quantitative content analysis and discourse analysis are employed to identify certain features of political discussion as it occurs through digitally mediated forms of communication while also assessing the quality of that discourse through the lens of Public Sphere Theory. I focus on the deliberative norms that are functionally necessary for the health of a deliberative democracy. The approach I have taken emphasizes the capacity for different methods to jointly illuminate complex phenomena. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are undertaken in tandem in order to provide richness of description alongside more generalizable conclusions, with neither imperative subservient to the other.

As it stands, much research has been done in this respect on popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. However, the preferences and habits of internet users

are constantly changing, and other platforms that have received much less attention are becoming increasingly relevant to the pressing issues surrounding the health of the democratic deliberation that occur online. One such neglected platform is Reddit, a news-aggregation website (and mobile app).[1] This site is especially of interest because of topically-centralized "sub-reddits" in which conversations are organized around a particular theme, which allows for a much more focused way to study various phenomena. Given that the recent presidential election has provided a great deal of material to discuss in the realm of contentious politics, dedicated political sub-reddits offer a natural place to looks for this material. There are, however, issues with using Reddit as an exemplar of deliberation. One such concern is the divisive gender politics of that space, giving rise to what Massanari terms "toxic technocultures" (2017, p.333). I will argue that, while this is certainly problematic, Reddit and the affordances it provides are also capable of facilitating constructive and inclusive discourse.

As a long-time Redditor and casual user of Facebook, I found myself wondering what role the kind of online discussion that occurs in a sub-reddit such as r/politics has in the actual functioning of democracy. This seemed especially pertinent to me because this was the kind of political participation that I identified with most, and it was also that which seemed to me to instantiate the kind of deliberative process which I endorsed as essential for democracy. The reason that I am drawn to this topic, then, involves elements of my own personal history and experiences as well as a commitment to improving the functioning of democratic institutions.

---

[1] Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter are all what are known as social media sites (Ellison and Vitak, 2015), in that they emphasize sociability and connectedness among users. Facebook belongs to a subcategory called "social networking sites," in which the network of connections between users is a prominent feature and is made manifest through the design of the site. "Friending," or making a connection with another user explicit, requires consent on both ends. Reddit is a content-aggregation site and discussion forum, in which pictures, videos, and links are shared. Each piece of content is then given its own space within which registered users can discuss the content. Finally, Twitter is a microblogging service in which short messages (280 characters or less) are distributed to the feed of all followers. Connections are asymmetrical, in opposition to Facebook, such that an account can follow another both without permission and without the other account following back.

Thus, I compare the affordances offered by a relatively understudied platform such as Reddit with what is perhaps the most well-studied platform, Facebook, in order to understand the differences those affordances make in terms of the quality of political discussions. Specifically, I looked at posted content containing official streams of White House press briefings. They are intended to represent the larger population of posts on social media and social networking sites concerning these press briefings. White House press briefings are interesting because they occur regularly, represent an (apparently) vetted and official message from the executive branch of the US government, and as such almost always concern explicitly political matters. It is reasonable, then, to expect public comment on such posts to be relevant to studies of political deliberation, especially given the contentious conditions surrounding the present administration. In addition, these press briefings represent a point of interaction between the administration and journalists tasked with holding officials accountable for their public statements. As such, discussion surrounding the press briefings is often oriented towards the public's expectations that the government address their concerns via the press. This particular choice of material for analysis is further addressed in chapter five.

All of this work is done in hopes of challenging prevailing attitudes of skepticism and despair about the potential for quality political discussions in online spaces. As literature is released that concludes, for example, that Twitter is prone to encourage and reinforce division based on political differences (Conover, Gonçalves, Flammini,et. al, 2012), we must always consider how the particular properties of the platform might be responsible for the findings (Freelon, 2015) and ask whether new forms of participation might encourage better or worse deliberation. In politically turbulent times such as we now find ourselves, I think it is of the utmost importance to understand why governments would be motivated to hold themselves

accountable to the publics they serve and how scholars can actively contribute to the cause of

equal representation among peoples. Through this work, I wish to publicly formulate a better

understanding of the relationship between ideal democratic theory and existing institutions and

practices.

Chapter 2: Conceptions of the Public Sphere

"By 'public sphere,' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (Habermas, 1964, p. 49)

What is the public sphere? The term "public sphere" is one which is intuitively grasped by most as it appears in everyday conversation. Simply canvassing a few recent news articles from major publications shows its widespread use, as in the following phrases "Pointing out terminological firearms faux pas has its place, however limited, in the public sphere" and "Since then, dozens more insulting comments were made in general in the public sphere in Israel…" (Gittleman, 2018; Weinstein, 2018). Despite being widely used and colloquially understood, it is in fact a contentious concept with a rich intellectual history and a variety of interpretations.

Because this study relies heavily upon the notion of the public sphere, it is important to outline some of the key developments of this concept, from its initial identification by Frankfurt-school philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, through criticisms following its English language translation in 1989, up to contemporary adaptations and applications in the context of a digitally networked global public. The entirety of the body of literature that deals with the public sphere and its diverse range of formulations is much too large to properly summarize here. Instead, I have chosen a few representative pieces from Habermas and those among his critics who are more or less sympathetic to the project of using the concept of the public sphere as a regulative ideal to guide political communication towards emancipatory ends.

In the opening pages of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas describes the public as "…the carrier of public opinion; its function as a critical judge is precisely what makes the public character of proceedings… meaningful" (Habermas, 1989, p. 2). In this groundbreaking work, originally published in 1962 but only translated into English in 1989, Habermas proceeds to give a sociological-historical account of the development of a particular category of bourgeois society, namely, the public sphere. It is a major contention of this work that the public sphere developed historically as the result of the waning sovereign power of the monarchy and the rise of the merchant class in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Possessing of time not dedicated to social reproduction and spaces in which they could congregate as "'common' human beings," the bourgeois initially gathered in salons and coffee shops to discuss art, music, and literary materials which had begun to circulate with regularity (Habermas, 1989). As the early forms of journalism took up reporting of open court proceedings and legislative processes, these spaces of critical discourse also took up issues of common concern, allowing participants to critique the policies of the governing parties and forming the initial juxtaposition between the state and civil society. Thus, the bourgeois public sphere was born.

The public sphere, then, played a mediating role between society and state, providing a forum for discussion about public affairs and thus "… a realm of private individuals assembled into a public body who as citizens transmit the needs of bourgeois society to the state, in order, ideally, to transform political into "rational" authority" (Habermas, 1964, p. 53). Ideally, the legitimacy of the state depended upon alignment of its policies with public opinion. Importantly, Habermas recognized both an empirical truth about the historical re-organization of society and, in keeping with Enlightenment ideals, the transformation of political power away from the model

of representative publicness (that is, displays of power by the sovereign) and towards democratic

self-governance through rational-critical discourse among private individuals.

        Though this original articulation is important, it is also necessary to note that, in the time

between the original publication of STPS and the release of its translation, Habermas developed

a substantial philosophical system which provided new grounds for the normative aspects of the

public sphere beyond those described above. Robert Holub's book *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in

the Public Sphere* (1991) offers a summary of Habermas' work during this period, especially

elaborating the connection between the historical/sociological approach taken in *The Structural

Transformation of the Public Sphere* and the more explicitly normative views that Habermas

developed through his own encounter with the linguistic turn and, as Holub argues, his optimism

about the potential for enlightenment values to offer emancipatory possibilities. Tracing these

developments through both *Knowledge and Interest* and *The Theory of Communicative Action,*

Holub discusses Habermas' search for a universal pragmatics, rooted in linguistic competency,

which could be identified through the process of rational reconstruction (1991, p. 10-11). A

universal pragmatics is helpful for the purposes of studying the public sphere because it

establishes the grounds for discursive norms as pragmatic presumptions necessary for

harmonizing the activities of communicatively competent subjects.

         Holub attributes to Habermas three modes of communication that all perform a function

in public sphere discourse: the cognitive mode is necessary for establishing what the facts are

and how they relate to one another as they are bundled in constellations as arguments; the

interactive mode is necessary for the sense in which public sphere discourse ultimately can be

expected to lead to action and can convince participants to cooperate in ways they would not

have had they not been convinced by compelling reasons; and the expressive mode is necessary

for discerning the intentions of participants, which is important given that public sphere

discourse requires the suspension of particular interests in service of holding the "moral

perspective," from which each can understand the reasons of anyone else (1991, p. 13). This last

element is especially important for overcoming one of Habermas' principle concerns: the

collapse of rational-critical discourse into the kind of economic reasoning prevalent in the

welfare state. Bridging the "gap between enlightened self-interest and orientation to the common

good" is crucial if there is to be hope for the public sphere to appropriately relate to deliberation

in a democratic system (Habermas, 1992, p. 449). Later, as the focus shifts to deliberation, the

necessity of each of these modes is made clear.

Publics and Counterpublics

Despite the uptake of Habermas' ideas on the European continent, it was largely not until

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere was translated into English in 1989 that the

theoretical notion of the public sphere was taken up by American critics. Among the most

important of these theorists was Nancy Fraser, who takes up Habermas' work on the Public

Sphere in her article "Rethinking the Public Sphere: Contribution to the Critique of Actually

Existing Democracy" (1990). As the title suggests, she attempts to reconcile Habermas' original

articulation with what she terms a "revisionist historiography," suggesting that certain empirical

facts about our present condition render assumptions of the bourgeois conception of the public

sphere suspect (p. 58). She argues that, while the concept remains necessary for a critical

approach to democratic theory and practice, it must be amended to account for various

inadequacies (p. 58). Most generally, by idealizing the liberal public sphere, Habermas neglects

the ways in which norms of the bourgeois public sphere exclude relevant parties from

participation based on gender and class, as well as the extent to which these parties form

competing public spheres to accomplish social and political goals. Beyond being merely

incidental omissions, these alternative interpretations suggest that some conflicts should actually

be constitutive of a new account of public and counterpublic spheres, one which Fraser (1990)

provides and is developed by others elsewhere.

Fraser identifies the following four problematic assumptions in his development of the

bourgeois public sphere: 1) that it is possible (or even desirable) to bracket inequalities in status

for the sake of deliberation 2) that a multiplicity of publics moves away from the ideal of the

public sphere as unitary and comprehensive 3) that a distinction between the common good and

private interests must be maintained, and that only the former is admissible for deliberation in the

public sphere 4) that the functioning of a public sphere depends upon a rigid separation between

civil society and the state (1990, p. 62-63).

The necessary amendments she suggests proceed as responses to these four assumptions:

1) rather than smoothing over inequalities as a procedural requirement for participation, the

theory should insist that resolving those inequalities is an important part of rendering functioning

public spheres possible; 2) a plurality of publics, beyond being a mere empirical inconvenience

for the theory, should actually be considered preferable, regardless of whether they develop in

stratified or egalitarian societies; 3) determinations of what counts as inadmissibly private often

serve to exclude persons and topics that many affected would benefit from including, and as

such, private interests should be allowed, and 4) both strong publics (legislators, public officials)

and weak publics (private citizens) should be considered to be instrumental for instituting the

proper relationship between the substantive results of deliberation and policy as enacted in law

(p. 77).

Habermas responded to a plethora of objections to his earlier theorizing of the public

sphere in his 1992 article "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere." He proceeds along three

general topics: "the historical genesis and the concept of the bourgeois public sphere," "the

structural change of the public sphere with regard to the transformation toward the social welfare

state and the change of the structures of communication through the mass media," and "the

theoretical perspective and its normative implications" (1992, p. 422)

He believes that the historical analysis offered in *The Structural Transformation of the Public*

Sphere has been corroborated by work since published within the field, both in terms of

agreement about the facts and his interpretation of them and the use of the concept of the public

sphere in the work of subsequent scholars. One criticism that has arisen, however, is the

suggestion that his description of the bourgeois public sphere is "overly stylized," leading to "an

overdrawn emphasis on the rational aspects of a public communication" (p. 424). In response, he

provides his own account of how subcultural and class-specific public spheres form, insisting

that one such class-specific public sphere was present very early on in the development of the

bourgeois public sphere: the plebian public sphere. This is not incompatible with his previous

account, as a constitutive exclusiveness makes possible the formation of public spheres which

appear not to satisfy the original social preconditions for the formation of the bourgeois public

sphere. In other words, subaltern counterpublics arise based upon their exclusion from the

privileged sphere.

In considering this example, he suggests that "the exclusion of women from this world

dominated by men now looks different than it appeared to me at the time," and subsequently

develops the ways in which he can incorporate these insights into the theory (p. 427). He says

that "the exclusion of women has been constitutive for the political public sphere not merely in

that the latter has been dominated by men as a matter of contingency but also in that its structure and relation to the private sphere has been determined in a gender-specific fashion" (p. 428). However, in contrast to his given example of the plebian public sphere, this exclusion "had structuring significance" (p. 428). What he means by this is that, unlike the case where the absence of underprivileged men from the bourgeois public sphere led to the development of an alternative sphere of discourse, gender-specific exclusions partially determined the relation of the public sphere to the private and structured that private sphere in ways which reinforced masculinist ideology.

More recent work has focused extensively upon this question of exclusion, identifying some of the tensions as arising from the public/ private dichotomy. Michael Warner (2002) picks up this thread in his book *Publics and Counterpublics.* Warner traces the historical construction of this dichotomy in Western thought from the classical age up to the present. He emphasizes that it is not just a distinction, but a hierarchy in which public spaces such as the market and the assembly are exclusionary realms of activities of higher value than those performed in privacy of the home (p. 28). A gendered aspect was always present in this conception of public and private, securing the former for property-owning men and relegating the latter to women and persons-as-property of the household. In addition, participation in the public arena was predicated upon the repression of private tendencies. Complicating matters, public and private spaces are not obviously delineated, and one becomes the other in different contexts. Furthermore, it is not only spaces that fall under this distinction, but contexts, persons and practices as well.

All of these considerations are necessary for thinking about the publicness of the public sphere and evaluating the kinds of claims that critics such as Nancy Fraser have made regarding the exclusion of private matters from the public sphere. The inclusion of topics traditionally

understood as belonging to the private realm is necessary for improving the inclusiveness of the

public sphere, yet Warner argues that the abolition of the private is not possible or even desirable

(p. 53). The existence of "the public" enables privacy as a realm of positive value, worthy of

preservation even for those who wish to bring their voices into the public sphere. This leads to a

discussion of the phrase "the personal (associated with privacy) is political (associated with

publicness)" and its two polar interpretations: a political critique of personal life vs. identitarian

critique of political life (p. 34). Both of these interpretations have implications for understanding

and critiquing the liberal tradition, which privileges a disinterested, abstract, universal public of

rational persons.

       With a better understanding of how the concept of the public has historically functioned

to structure the public sphere, Warner turns to the problematic nature of a unitary,

comprehensive public sphere by offering an analysis of "the public," "a public," and

"counterpublics." He proceeds by outlining seven defining features of publics:

1) Publics are self-organizing, which is to say that they are a space of discourse organized *by*

discourse (p. 67). In this sense, they are both virtual and material objects, notional and empirical,

existing "in virtue of being addressed" but not presuming a pre-existing public to be addressed.

This circularity, Warner asserts, "is essential to the phenomenon" (p. 67). The major claim made

here is that "publics do not exist apart from the discourses that address them" (p. 72). Publics are

imaginary, but do have a social basis, in that they fail if they have no reception in the world—it's

just that they are not to be identified with this social basis. Warner also points to this aspect as

being responsible for difficulties in identifying and empirically studying the boundaries of

publics, a theoretical problem which will be addresses explicitly in further chapters of this study.

2) "A public is essentially a relation among strangers" (p. 74). This means that an address to a public cannot know its entire audience in advance, always containing an open-ended invitation to unite strangers through participation alone. 3) "The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal" (p. 76). Public speech calls to us as individuals with particular properties which make it possible for us to receive its messages, but it always also calls to an indefinite body of others. 4) "A public is constituted through mere attention," or "the fact of active uptake" (p. 87) Attention, then, is the only real criteria for membership, again problematizing the study of publics from a social science perspective. While active participation in terms of speech can often be easily identified, the passive participation of listening, seeing, feeling, etc. is usually invisible. 5) "A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (p. 90). Warner calls a public a "cross-citational field" (p. 95). There is always discourse before (what one is responding to) and discourse after (those responding to what one has said).

6) "Publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation" (p. 96) This focus on circulation is crucial for Warner's account and is a major point of departure from Habermas. Warner criticizes earlier public sphere conceptions for understanding publics as conversational and oriented towards a terminating decision-making process. Publics do derive their agency by making decisions, but "there is no moment at which the conversation stops and a decision ensues" (p. 97). This aspect of temporality is also particularly salient for studies of the political public sphere on the internet, as the 24-hour news cycle and the ephemeral nature of digital artifacts fundamentally changes the experience of temporal circulation of common texts. Warner considers this, going so far as to say that "It may even be necessary to abandon 'circulation' as an analytic category" (p. 97). 7) "A public is poetic world making" (p. 114) Public discourse contains a perfomative dimension which brings its own character into being (p. 114).

The other major part of Warner's essay, beyond explicating these essential features of publics, is an in-depth discussion of counterpublics. He continues Fraser's criticism of Habermas for focusing on one, dominant conception of the public sphere to the exclusion of other publics governed by different discursive norms. He says that "when any public is taken to be 'the public,' those limitations invisibly order the political world" (p. 107). However, he also points out that tensions between the universal form (with infinite potential for reception and maximum inclusiveness) and particularization (actual reception by real people) are inherent in the conception of the public sphere itself (p. 106). It is not a wrinkle to be ironed out, but rather a permanent source of power struggles. In fact, the projection of a public, especially as *the* public, is a particular kind of power (p. 108). Designation of the dominant culture as public is a point of contention which itself enters into both public and counterpublic spheres and nurtures "the fruitful perversity of public discourse" (p. 113). Counterpublics maintain "at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of [their] subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one… [extending] not just to ideas or policy questions but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public" (p. 119).

I have outlined Warner's views in detail because I find them to be compelling and analytically necessary for the development of methods for the empirical study of public spheres. Specifically, it is necessary to draw upon the rich theoretical understanding of the importance of circulation, projection of the dominant culture as "the public," and a plurality of agonistic counterpublics.

The Transnational Public Sphere

Fraser (2007) returns to her task of rethinking the public sphere in her article "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World," this time hoping to account for the new "postnational constellation" (p.8). Despite Habermas' additional contributions in terms of a normative grounding for public sphere discourse, there remains a problem in terms of democratic theory proceeding based upon a Westphalian paradigm of national sovereignty. The reality of globalization requires us to challenge this paradigm, and in so doing we must also reassess the extent to which public sphere theory depends upon the concept of sovereign states with territorially bound citizenries.

Fraser outlines six ways in which Habermas' original version of the theory has such dependencies: 1) public opinion is addressed to the Westphalian state 2) participants in the public sphere are concurrently members of a shared bounded political community 3) public opinion is primarily focused upon governing their nation's economic policies 4) public sphere discourse was conducted through the use of a communications infrastructure contained within a Westphalian state 5) participants speak a shared language with one another 6) participants share a national body of literature. She goes on to problematize each of these assumptions with modern examples of life in a global society. This leads her to ask how both the normative and empirical aspects of the theory can be salvaged when these rather foundational elements are brought into question.

Fraser introduces the twin notions of normative legitimacy and political efficacy to shed light on these difficulties. She says that these are "intrinsic, indispensable elements of any conception of publicity that purports to be critical, regardless of the socio-historical conditions in which it

obtains" (p. 20). Legitimacy obtains only when all who would be affected by the outcome of deliberation concerning the organization of their lives are allowed to participate. This she comes to refer to as "the all-affected principle." Efficacy obtains "if and only if it is mobilized as a political force to hold public power accountable, ensuring that the latter's exercise reflects the considered will of civil society" (p. 22).

She breaks legitimacy down into both an inclusiveness condition and a parity condition, summarized as the "who" and the "how" of deliberation in a public sphere. The inclusiveness condition had been neglected in past treatments due to the readily available answer to who ought to be included: members of the political community. Thus, the parity condition was the only one emphasized. However, in a Post-Westphalian world, we must again pay attention to the inclusiveness condition, as there are now many who are affected by the outcome of political deliberation who are not proper members of the nation state within which that deliberation takes place—that is, if it occurs within a nation state at all, as communication infrastructure is often now instantiated in distributed global networks of communication. Her solution is to flesh out the all-affected principle in a way that does not reference states, saying "the all-affected principle holds that what turns a collection of people into fellow members of a public is not shared citizenship, but their co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives" (p. 22).

On the issue of efficacy, she identifies another two distinct conditions, and in a parallel case, suggests that one has been emphasized over the other again due to the background assumptions of a Westphalian paradigm. These conditions are the translation condition and the capacity condition. The former, long the focus of public sphere theory, is concerned with how public opinion is translated from the publics in which it develops into law and is effected through

administrative power. The capacity condition, requiring that actors responsible for exercising

public power be able to bring about what was demanded of them, went unconsidered because it

was usually a non-issue as to whether the monolithic power of the state could carry out the

policies being requested. Fraser admits that a solution to the problem of political efficacy is

much more difficult when the addressee is not a Westphalian state, but points out that the

creation of new structures can only begin once we understand the true conditions necessary for

the proper functioning of a critical publicity.

Discourse Theory and Public Sphere Theory

While Habermas recognizes his failure to appreciate the significance of certain aspects of

the institutionalization of the public sphere in the bourgeois constitutional state, he insists that his

critics conceive of the contradictions between the normative aspects of his theory and the

empirical reality of the bourgeois constitutional state too rigidly. Rather, he insists that "the

tensions that come to the fore in the liberal public sphere must be depicted more clearly as

potentials for a self-transformation" (1992, p. 430). Habermas considers this to be an important

difference between his account of the public sphere and Foucaultian discourse theory. He

suggests that "Bourgeois publicness… is articulated in discourses that provided areas of common

ground not only for the labor movement but also for the excluded other, that is, the feminist

movement" (p. 429). Foucaultian discourses, he suggests, are unaffected by criticisms from

within. It is only from without that transformation can occur. In order to evaluate the potential

for self-transformation as embodied in the public sphere's self-interpretation, it is necessary now

to end this chapter with a brief discussion of discourse theory and its relationship to Habermas's

account of the bourgeois public sphere.

Drawing from the work of Post-Marxist philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe, Lincoln Dahlberg summarizes discourse theory and explicates the similarities and differences between the two theories. Of discourse theory, he says that "[it] is, at its core, a theory of politics: of the hegemonic formation of social relations—of discourses—that necessarily involve hierarchies of power and relations of inclusion and exclusion" (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 41). It accords a special place to radical contingency, even regarding its own status *as* discourse, insisting that all discourses are "open to the possibility of being contested by that which it has excluded and repressed" (p. 42). In addition, "…discourse theory and Habermas *agree* that dissensus *and* consensus, or openness *and* closure, as well as some form of democratic interaction, are central to a conception of the public sphere," which, for both theories, "comes into being wherever a breakdown of social consensus arises" (p. 45). Closure, to be understood as stability of meaning and practice (discourse theory) or deliberative agreement (Habermasian public sphere theory), is seen as the motivation for discursive activity, be it in the form of hegemonic rearticulations or deliberation. The significant difference between the two theories, however, is that the public sphere of Habermasian theory "emphasizes rational deliberation" (p. 45), whereas discourse theory expects agonistic contestation and hegemonic rearticulations. Another way of putting this is that Habermasian theory appeals to a set of constitutive norms which govern deliberation and possess universal validity grounded epistemically in a rational reconstruction of the conditions for the possibility of communicative rationality. Drawing heavily from Kant, we see the employment of transcendental reasoning to justify what is ultimately an unabashedly normative conception. On the other hand, discourse theory is committed to the radical contingency of all discourse. Discourse is contingent in that all posited entities and relations are dependent upon other entities and relations (no discursive object is self-

grounded), and this contingency is radical in that it is utterly inescapable… all entities and

relations are necessarily dependent upon others.

Arbitrating between these theories is a philosophical project too complex and ambitious

for the present work. However, for the sake of later arguments, I have chosen to endorse the

Habermasian conception of the public sphere. In the next chapter, I will discuss several of the

reasons for this decision as they concern deliberative democracy. Briefly stated, however, it is

the capacity for Habermas' conception of communicative rationality to serve as the "basis for

judging empirical 'distortions' within particular deliberations" (p. 45) that I am most interested

in. As applied to online spaces, a program such as mine that seeks to identify the success of

deliberation needs to be able to appeal to a normative conception of deliberation in order to

understand the pathologies which plague our democratic institutions and processes. Rather than

considering such norms to be contingent upon present discursive structures, I have chosen to see

at least some of them as universal conditions for the possibility of truly democratic deliberation.

What I have drawn from discourse theory and the objections to the Habermasian conception

listed above is the idea that not all such norms should be considered universal. Rather,

counterpublics constantly challenge these guidelines and institute their own. While this presents

a theoretical and methodological issue of enormous importance, it is also immensely

fruitful: how do we determine which norms are contingent but authentic (arising from authentic

rather than strategic communication), and which norms are actually the results of systematic

distortions? This question will be addressed throughout the remainder of this work, and its

importance will be highlighted in the concluding chapter as it relates to the present crises faced

by democracy.

Chapter 3: Deliberation and Democracy

There are a multitude of possible political systems, even if we simply go by those which have already come and gone. It is far beyond the scope of this thesis to argue extensively for democracy as it competes with other forms of governance. Rather, I take it to be much more feasible to simply extoll the value of democracy and develop one particularly salient model for its proper functioning. In the conclusion to this thesis, I will return to the question of the worth of democracy and what is presently at stake in terms of the material and cultural conditions for its continued survival. For now, let's turn to the task of defining deliberative democracy in contention with other models.

Models of Democracy

What is necessary for a political system to be considered a democracy? Political Scientist Robert Dahl (as cited in Gastil, 2008) provides three dimensions upon which a system can be evaluated for the extent to which it is democratic: inclusivity, effective participation, and enlightened understanding (p. 5). Inclusion, Gastil tells us, requires the system to involve in its political processes all adult members residing with its boundaries. In addition, participation must be equal in quality and adequately contributory to policy decisions (p. 5-6). Finally, enlightened understanding is a cognitive requirement that necessitates extensive understanding of the issues at hand and possession of relevant information surrounding those issues. (p. 7-8).

There are many other ways to divide up and categorize different conceptions of democracy. A popular and time-honored distinction is between direct and indirect, concerning the distance between the democratic subject and the final decision-making process. Far from a simple bivalent dichotomy, this distinction is best considered as an axis of variation. On the extreme "direct" end of the spectrum, we have models which demand direct input from all

credentialed participants of the political process, which is to say, the people. On the other end,

we have indirect models, which posit various layers of distance between the people and the

actual policies enacted by their government. One such example on this end would be a

representative model, where representative delegates are elected through democratic processes to

represent the general will of their constituents.

Another way to divide up the models of democracy is by breaking them down into three

camps based upon their conceptualization of the democratic subject and the origins of

legitimacy. Lincoln Dahlberg (2007) summarizes such perspectives as (1) liberal-individualist,

(2) communitarian, and (3) deliberative. The liberal-individualist view suggests that each

democratic subject is unitary and atomistic, making decisions individually based upon their own

values, beliefs, and desires. Whatever "comes" out, so to speak, when opinions are polled (be it

voting or some other democratic process), is representative of their political will, and procedures

for determining sufficient majorities are enacted on the collected opinions of all credentialed

persons. The communitarian model, on the other hand, relies upon the community as its

democratic subject. Communities develop opinions on issues based on their shared values and

proprietary decision-making processes, often based upon tradition. A communitarian democracy

functions best when the final policy decisions best represent what a majority of communities

endorse. Finally, the deliberative model depends upon the notion of a rational-critical process of

deliberation aimed at reaching a consensus on policy decisions. It relies upon a robust notion of

the public sphere as the space in which all persons can participate with equal parity, mutual

respect, and shared information in a process guided by principles of communicative rationality.

Before discussing why deliberative democracy ought to be chosen over the other two models,

however, it is important we think more about what deliberation is.

Defining Deliberation

While related to the public sphere, deliberation is its own concept and bears further explication. John Gastil's book "Political Communication and Deliberation" (2008) is an excellent source for such work, and I have drawn extensively from his discussions in this piece. Gastil tells us that "When people deliberate, they carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well-reasoned solution after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view (p. 8)" Unpacking this "shorthand definition," Gastil discusses the four essential features of deliberation: beginning with "a solid information base to makes sure we understand the nature of the problem," identifying and prioritizing "the key values at stake in an issue," recognizing "a broad range of solutions that might address the problem," and weighing "the pros, cons, and trade-offs" of the solutions by systematically applying our knowledge and values to each alternative" (p. 9). It is due to these very features that Dahlberg emphasizes the strength of deliberative democracy over the other two forms (liberal-individualist and communitarian), which he designates as "weak" models (2007). Dahlberg suggests these models posit "fixed and private political subjects," committing them to seeing democracy as "…either equated with strategic competition between pre-determined interest," as in the liberal-individualist model, or "subsumed within the ethically integrated community," as in the communitarian model (p. 49). Deliberative democracy, on the other hand, does not conceive of political subjects in this way, which allows it to secure and facilitate public sovereignty. Related to the concept of popular sovereignty found in the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau, public sovereignty refers to the governance of the public by the public. The strength of democracy, according to Dahlberg, lies in its ability to secure legitimacy for institutions and decisions based upon public sovereignty, and the public cannot be sovereign when it is subject to the whims of the economic subject or the

traditions of communities. This special form of self-rule requires a forum for discourse that is autonomous and facilitates authentic communication. The liberal-individualist model fails to appreciate the communicative aspect of this forum, while the communitarian model discourages the departures from tradition that are essential to critique.

Defending Deliberation

With this endorsement of deliberative democracy, I suggest that it is in fact the only notion robust enough to secure true legitimacy for institutions according to the principle of public sovereignty. Respecting this principle requires us to ask of our institutions whether they are sensitive to the outcomes of deliberation in the public sphere and how well governance reflects such sensitivities. Having considered the positive arguments for this model of democracy, it is time to evaluate the best objections against it. Regina Kreide's article "Digital Spaces, Public Places and Communicative Power: In Defense of Deliberative Democracy" (2016) articulates a powerful epistemic function for deliberative democracy and then summarizes, develops, and responds to various objections to the deliberative model, including those which concern its application to digital spaces such as the internet. I'll briefly list the challenges that she identifies in order to consider and build upon her responses to them.

One of the advantages that Kreide emphasizes about deliberative democracy is the extent to which this model can appreciate and use the findings of social science inquiry to criticize institutions. On the one hand, theories of deliberative democracy are dependent upon a "diagnostic" function for recognizing what Kreide calls "pathologies of communication" (2016, p. 482) These pathologies are ways in which communication deviates from the norms governing deliberation in the public sphere, and oftentimes are the result of systematic distortions of communication (one way in which economic and bureaucratic systems colonize the lifeworld) or

inauthentic participation. By inauthentic participation, I mean that kind of communication which is strategic in nature, rather than expressive of a desire to cooperate toward the mutual accomplishment of interdependently established ends.

Systematic distortions often arise from state and market forces seeking to colonize the "lifeworld" of the social self. Operating according to control imperatives characteristic of the instrumental rationality that dominates our modern world, these forces seek to guide human behavior in order to accomplish the twin goals of administrative stability and economic efficiency. As such, distortions of this kind are planned, programmatic, and pervasive, taking form through mass-media broadcasting, advertisements, and public relations campaigns. Furthermore, they often work on multiple levels: they can alter language from the elementary word or phrasal levels or effect changes all the way up to complex manipulation of narratives, histories, and world views.

On the other hand, strategic communication can also take the form of deceptive interpersonal communication intended to persuade a person by various means with the intention of achieving some goal (that is, it is associated with the interests of the speaker) other than consensus based upon good reasons. Such is the subject of a chapter in Danielle Allen's 2004 "Talking to Strangers." Here, Allen criticizes Habermas for counting out what philosopher of language J.L. Austin calls "perlocutionary speech acts." Habermas' own philosophy focuses upon illocutionary speech acts, roughly approximating to those acts capable of affecting the world through speech. According to Allen, Habermas prioritizes the illocutionary and demonizes the perlocutionary as "strategic" action rather than the desirable "communicative action" (Allen, 20014, p. 57-58). Allen's contention against Habermas is that such gerrymandering of speech acts (thus accusing him of departing from Austin's own version of the categories) prevents his

account from understanding how trust is formed through communication that is not simply and

solely aimed at rational consensus (p. 59). Taking Allen's criticism to be representative of a

whole class of objections that make cases for a broader definition of authentic communication

that is inclusive of interest and affect, I suggest that we prioritize the identification of systematic

distortions, as defined above, over the critique of perlocutionary interpersonal speech.

 In this respect, I have emphasized a diagnostic function for the set of deliberative norms

that constitute the public sphere. This function relies heavily upon empirical investigation of

social phenomena, determining how and to what extent norms are being flouted, overlooked, or

insufficiently satisfied. By studying and comparing the various ways in which people

communicate about those things that will affect them (the political), those things which are

topically related under the heading of "politics", and even the explicitly non-political, we can

come to understand and identify harmful exogenous influences on this crucially important

democratic process.

On the other hand, Kreide highlights a conceptual relationship between Habermas' view

that "cognition itself [is] a social event in which all should participate as far as possible" and

Dewey's conception of democracy as experimental in character (p.478). The result is a model of

democracy that appreciates the fallibility of reason and the importance of constantly revising our

beliefs, practices and institutions. Several of her responses to the considered objections refer, in

one way or another, to this aspect of deliberative democracy, namely "the assumption… that the

best way to solve complex problems is through the knowledge of the many, not of the few" (p.

478).

With these epistemic/cognitive aspects of the public sphere in the background, I would

like to briefly recapitulate the five objections that she identifies. The first is that deliberative

democracy is too idealistic, relying heavily on a notion of consensus, taken to be a rare beast as things presently stand. The second is that the contingency of the deliberative process (no particular outcome is guaranteed by its proper functioning) is exhausting for the citizenry, prompting them to seek "a definition and closure of the community of citizens" much more in line with the communitarian model of democracy (p. 479). The third and fourth ask whether the process of deliberation relies upon an "antiquated notion of a shared 'we' of political actors" and if this problematizes the extension of the process to online settings due to de-personalizing aspects of digital media. This last pairing of objections should sound very familiar to the issues already raised concerning counterpublic spheres and the reality of substantial political difference (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002; Dahlberg, 2007).

The first objection is among the most common criticisms made of deliberative democracy and public sphere theory in general. If the key task in deliberative democracy is deliberation and its telos is consensus, then it is too idealistic because consensus is nigh unobtainable regarding all but the most trivial issues. Even in ideal circumstances, where communication functions without distortion, misunderstanding, or enmity, consensus may still fail to obtain. Deliberation would be hopelessly unlikely to achieve its ends in those circumstances and the model would have to account for legitimate alternative decision-making procedures beyond deliberation that could be referred to when such failures occur… coordination based, as Kreide suggests, on economic, instrumental, political, or legal imperatives. (p. 479) This would undermine the basic tenets of a deliberative democracy based on communicative action.

On the contrary, she points out that consensus as a possible (and admittedly desirable) outcome of the agreement-function of communication is not the end-in-itself of communicative action… in fact, the agreement function should be seen as continuing to operate successfully

when we "agree to disagree" (p. 479). I would go further and suggest that such meta-agreements are perhaps one of the most common features of a deliberative body that exists in conditions of substantial plurality of values and fact-systems. Having the option to do so relieves pressure from those continuously working towards consensus building… there's an "end in sight" for the weary, so to speak, temporary as it may be.

Thus, one thing to like about deliberative democracy is that agreement isn't ever expected to be final. Against traditional forms of representative democracy, it sees itself as having a much more radical view of what beliefs, practices and institutions can potentially undergo in terms of reformation as the result of deliberation. As Kreide powerfully expresses it, "…communicative power is not just about deliberation and offering arguments. Instead, [it is] aimed at the existing institutions, conditions, and practices. It is the power to question" (p. 484). This power to question humbles even the most recalcitrant and foundational beliefs that we hold, and is an essential component to the truth-conduciveness of the public sphere as an epistemological instrument. However, in this capacity, it must admit as objects of scrutiny its own governing values. In order to be consistent, then, even the deliberative norms that serve as regulative ideals must also be fallible (capable of being shown as false). This provokes a difficult question: Does the fallibility of particular deliberative norms problematize the conception of deliberative democracy espoused thus far?

Identifiable norms that guide and define successful deliberation in the public sphere play a rather large role in her defense of deliberative democracy. Some of the previously suggested presuppositions necessary for deliberation have been inclusiveness, equality of voices, freedom from deception, and freedom from coercion (Bohman, 2004). While none of these stands out as misguided, it is important to remember the social aspect of knowledge production in the

deliberative model of democracy. In an important way, no beliefs are safe from reconsideration and revision as empirical investigation unveils new and public reasons for competing perspectives… including what counts as authentic communication aimed at common will-formation. I wonder how it is, then, that deliberation *about* deliberation is supposed to occur within the public sphere. This question is raised for me in relation to the potential for social science research on public spheres and various pragmatic issues that arise partially, I think, because of ambiguity in the theory.

Take, for example, the issue of identifying speech acts as constituting deliberation. If, as researchers, we take a settled view about which norms will clue us into whether or not democratic deliberation is taking place, then we will bias our sample in terms of the speech communities we actually end up studying. That is to say, we'd only be looking at those which followed whichever set of rules for discussion we decided we most endorsed, or were perceived as most common, or perhaps were simply convenient for our purposes. If the question were later raised about whether or not there is empirical support for widely accepted public sphere norms, we would point to the body of research which had implicitly assumed them, thus reasoning in a viciously circular manner and denying ourselves the falsifiability that I view as a strength of the model.

On the other hand, if we begin with no presuppositions about which norms properly govern deliberation and proceed in a thoroughly inductive, bottom-up manner, we lose out on the other virtue of the theory: recognizing systematic distortions of communication. How could we possibly separate the regularities that are the result of healthy communicative norms and the symptoms of communication pathologies?

I think that the answer, consistent with the tenets already discussed, appeals to more and less stable forms of overlapping consensus. Here I am drawing from the work of John Rawls, a political philosopher with whom Habermas was often engaged. While their views certainly differ, the concept of overlapping consensus is helpful for thinking about how persons with significantly different world views and value systems (what Rawls terms "comprehensive doctrines" (1995)) might agree upon certain political norms which they could draw from in order to proceed in the formation of constitutional regimes (1995, p. 15). We may find that, when tasked with deliberating about deliberation, all participants in the public sphere may agree on a few core essentials that both have and ought to govern public sphere discourse. These we could take as stable, universal markers of healthy public sphere activity, though if the consensus were ever broken (as is always possible), we would have to revisit the issue. The less stable forms of overlapping consensus would be parochial rather than universal; these are active "pockets" of agreement about the nature of deliberation which do not yet enjoy the more stable form of overlapping consensus, but seem to exist as potential future claimants of that status. Public sphere research, then, would use both forms to guide its efforts, the former in service of the diagnostic function of rooting out pathologies, the latter providing the ground-up approach that avoids circularity.

It is perhaps beyond the scope of this thesis to explicate the concept of deliberation further than I have already done. However, in order to extend the theoretical concerns that have been developed thus far to the realm of the empirical, it is probably best to explore deliberation as it actually occurs in interpersonal communication, specifically as it is mediated by information communication technologies such as mobile devices and computers. I draw from political

psychology and communication theory in order to justify my position that digitally mediated forms of communication offer potential for enhanced, rather than deficient, deliberation.

Systematic Distortions of Communication

The notion seems abstract at first: that our communicative practices are altered in subtle and systematic ways. However, much work has already been done on the problem of identifying what such distortions might look like. In "Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions within Communication Networks," Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004) outline "A variety of factors [which] might render political communication ineffective by distorting the political messages being sent from one person to another" (p. 70). While their definition of undistorted communication differs from Habermas', it remains indebted to his thought and is helpful for operationalizing distortions. They think of systematic distortions as challenging the effectiveness of political communication, where effective communication is identified as "… unambiguous… [while] the person receiving the communication must *readily, confidently,* and *accurately* perceive the intent of the sender" (p. 69). "Thus," they say, "effective political communication is usefully conceived as the absence of distortion in one person's judgment regarding the political opinions of another, wholly apart from influence or agreement" (p. 69). They go on to suggest that the following four modes of distortion play a major role in political communication: (1) preferences of the sender; (2) (in)frequency of exposure; (3) false consensus effects; and (4) network effects (p. 70-72).

I will briefly summarize each of these categories as follows: in the first case, the strength of the sender's opinions and the accessibility of those opinions to their cognitive structure make for more effective communication of those opinions. Distorted communication can therefore occur in cases where communicators are ambivalent about the issues being discussed, or where

the opinions expressed are not obviously related to other strong opinions they may hold.

Regarding frequency of exposure, they suggest that the more often a person is exposed to the

political opinions of another, the more likely they are to communicate effectively. Thus, the

infrequent exposure marked by discussion with utter strangers is expected to diminish the

effectiveness of political communication. Third, they find that people assume agreement where

there is none, resulting in a failure to appreciate nuance and comprehend the actual intent of the

speaker when they express their political opinions to one another. This largely results from a

desire to confirm one's own beliefs rather than engage with new beliefs. Finally, they point to

network level effects on communication. Essentially, this kind of distortion occurs because

discussants infer based on their social network what others believe, leading them to miss

important differences in beliefs when those beliefs are expressed ambiguously.

Each of these distortions are the result of psycho-social influences and exemplify certain

kinds of systematic distortions which, while they may not find their source among state and

market forces, can be manipulated for their ends. In the quantitative research that follows in

chapter 5 of this thesis, I will employ their concept of undistorted communication to explicate

one of the preconditions for effective political deliberation. There is one further point, however,

that the authors make throughout the aforementioned book, and it is one that enriches what has

been said thus far about the value of deliberation. Namely, they argue that "tolerance,

compromise, and engagement are anchored in the experience of political diversity. In this way

the benefits of deliberation depend on disagreement, where disagreement is defined in terms of

interaction among citizen who hold divergent viewpoints regarding politics. In summary, both

tolerance and deliberation lose meaning absent disagreement…" (2004, p. 3-4). Thus, while

deliberation is aimed at consensus, the fact of significant political disagreement is a virtue, not a

vice, and should not be taken to disprove the deliberative model. If anything, it makes a case for its necessity.

Computer Mediated Communication

Another way in which communication is purported to be distorted systematically is the way in which it is mediated by technology. Given that my focus has been on online political discussion, it only makes sense to turn to scholarship on the ways in which computers and other digital devices commonly facilitate communication about political topics. Within the discipline of communication, this field (not restricted to politics, of course) is often referred to as computer mediated communication studies, and the work of one of its most prominent scholars is particularly pertinent to us. In his "Theories of Computer-Mediated Communication and Interpersonal Relations," Joseph Walther (2011) argues against the prevailing attitude toward computer mediated communication which fundamentally relegates it to a deficient or parasitic form in comparison to the face-to-face model. He refers to the theories that advance this attitude as "cues filtered out" theories, meaning that the kinds of non-verbal communication that occur in face-to-face communication are filtered out by the apparently limited capabilities of digital communication technologies. Without such cues, the argument goes, participants can be expected to send ambiguous messages which are then received with limited comprehension. Walther's view, however argues that such theories are seriously flawed, offering his own complimentary theories of Social Information Processing (SIP) and Hyperpersonalization. The first theory makes two major claims: (1) that computer mediated forms of communication offer different, rather than fewer, ways of expressing oneself, and that the nonverbal cues present in face-to-face communication but absent in computer mediated communication are replaced with novel forms of verbal and/or symbolic expression and, as a result, (2) such communication can

therefore be expected to take more time than face-to-face communication, indicating that prior studies which did not properly account for the distended temporal requirements are flawed (Walther, 2011, p. 458).

Furthermore, and perhaps most relevant to this thesis, he offered the theory of hyperpersonalization, in which computer mediated communication can actually be expected to produce greater communicative outcomes given certain unique affordances of digital communication technologies. These can be broken down into four kinds of effects: (1) "effects due to receiver processes," in which, in the absence of information about the sender, recipients of computer mediated messages construct a favorable stand-in persona for the sender (p. 460); (2) "effects among message senders," in which selective self-presentation encourages greater disclosure among participants (p. 460-461); (3) "attributes of the channel," wherein features of the medium afford "the ability to edit, delete, and rewrite messages to make them reflect intended effects before sending them" (p. 460-461); and (4) "feedback effects," which refer to the extent to which participants in computer mediated communication are better able to receive feedback based on their performance and alter their communication accordingly (p. 460-463).

Each of these aspects can be applied to the specific kind of communication required of deliberation, allowing us to recognize not only how deliberation could occur through digitally mediated channels, but indeed how such communication could be potentially improved by the technological affordances produced in such environments.

There are, of course, many, many other things to be said about how political deliberation is affected by systematic distortions of communication, but the above-mentioned framework give us a good starting point from which to judge whether any particular observed instance of deliberation is being distorted by various psychological and sociological factors. In addition, the

hyperpersonalization model developed by Walther is implicit in the argument that I have thus far

been making: that online discussion about politics need not be fundamentally inferior to face-to-

face deliberation, and that there is indeed hope for computer mediated forms of communication

to facilitate healthier political discourse.

The Affordances Perspective

As we move into the intersection between communication and technology (addressed

more fully in the next chapter), it is important discuss, if only briefly, an important development

in the study of how technology and human activity are related. Earlier literature on this subject

often treated technology deterministically, for better or worse. Either technology would guide us

towards the realization of utopian potential, or else it would dissolve the connections between us

and make us slaves to technological imperatives. This view would come to be heavily criticized,

resulting in a swing of the pendulum to the other extreme, as exemplified by a view which is

known as Social Construction of Technology, or SCOT (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). SCOT suggests

that "technological artefacts are culturally constructed and interpreted" (p. 421), using the

concept of interpretive flexibility to show how both use and design of technology is not

determinate, but rather subject to the socio-cultural contexts in which that technology is situated

(Pinch & Bijker, 1984). However, the latter view deemphasized the properties of the artefacts,

and how such properties might enter into explanations of both novel uses and cases of "closure"

(Kline & Pinch, 1996, p. 766), in which use has stabilized toward a singular sanctioned set of

uses. A theoretical framework which allows for sufficient consideration of both the materiality of

technology and the myriad uses to which it is put is needed.

Enter the affordances perspective. Evans, Pearce, Vitak, and Treem understand

affordances as a complex system of relations "between an object/technology and the user that

enables or constrains potential behavioral outcomes in a particular context" (2016, p. 37) This means that "the materiality of technology influences, but does not determine, the possibilities for users" (p. 37). They go on to clarify the concept of affordances, noting its inconsistent use in the literature, by saying that affordances must lie somewhere between properties of technological objects, or features, and the outcomes accomplished by the use of that technology (Evans, Pearce, Vitak, and Treem, 2016). In addition, affordances must be capable of variation. Thus, to give an example from the list of affordances they identify as legitimately deserving of that label, there are varying *degrees* of visibility in communication technologies based in part upon who gets to see what. In later analyses, I will make use of the following affordances that Evans et al. recognized: anonymity, persistence, and visibility. Following Halpern and Gibbs (2013), I understand anonymity as identifiability of participation, and use that term in chapter 5 to describe the differences between Facebook and Reddit. Persistence is "durability" (Evans et al., 2016, p. 41), in that persistent messages remain long after their creation. Finally, visibility refers to whether a piece of information can be located, as well as the relative ease with which

it can be located (2016, p. 42).

The reason that the affordances perspective has been adopted is largely because of its capacity to extend conclusions beyond a mere comparison of platforms. While this research is nominally concerned with comparing Facebook and Reddit, it is much more concerned with understanding how certain constellations of affordances are related to communicative behavior, specifically, democratic deliberation. This allows the conclusions to be applied to other platforms and other constellations of affordances, thus permitting research that is cumulative and theoretically rich rather than singular and situational.

Chapter 4:

Information Communication Technologies, Power, and the Public Sphere

Does democratic deliberation happen online? If so, how and where does it play out? How should it look, ideally, and how far are we from that ideal? These are questions with which I and many others have often wrestled, and theorists attempt to approach these issues from a number of angles. Having discussed arguments concerning the nature and quality of democracy in previous chapters, it has become clear that there are a number of conceptual problems with deliberation itself. One of these difficulties, addressed in the previous chapter, concerns the difficulty of reaching a consensus. Another focuses on how taxing such activity is on the participants, requiring expenditure of time and effort for a process that seems, at times, fruitless. A third is that it constantly challenges the identities of those involved, requiring that they reevaluate their beliefs and, indeed, their worldviews in order to accommodate new information, a task which is demanding in even the most favorable circumstances. However, what I wish to draw attention to here is the extent to which the proliferation of information communication technologies has affected our capacity to engage with one another in the virtual democratic space of the public sphere, and reciprocally, how technology enters public sphere discourse through technological culture and offers tempting solutions to the problems we encounter there. Fundamentally, this view considers the ways in which technology and discourse are mutually shaped by one another. Following philosopher of technology Andrew Feenberg, I too suggest that "Democratization of modern technically mediated organizations is not fundamentally about the distribution of wealth nor even formal administrative authority, but concerns the structure of communicative practices" (1999, p. 120)

In Chapter 2, I outlined certain difficulties with applying Habermasian formulations of the public sphere to empirical descriptions of how political discourse plays out in contemporary settings. One way of uniting these objections under a common heading is to suggest that the early articulation was not equipped to adequately account for changing relations of power between and surrounding interlocutors, especially insofar as power manifests itself in subtle new ways over time. As theorist of deliberative democracy Lincoln Dahlberg suggests, "despite claims that [a rationalistic conception of the public sphere] makes room for difference and produces public sovereignty, [it] fails to adequately theorize the power relations in deliberation, leading to support for status quo exclusions and domination" (2007, p. 51). In the discussion that follows, we'll look at how two kinds of power—network power and protocol power—apply to the concept of the public sphere and the political discourse that occurs in online spaces, paying special attention to the interactions between these two forms of power and the extent to which they illuminate a third kind of power identified in Michael Warner's (2002) *Publics and Counterpublics*, namely, the power wielded by the dominant culture in the projection of its discursive norms as constitutive of *the* public (p. 108).

To begin with, I suggest we turn to Manuel Castells' network approach. In the conclusion to his seminal work, *The Rise of the Network Society*, he tells us that the "dominant functions and processes of the information age are increasingly organized around networks" (2000, p. 500). By this, he means that "…networking logic substantially modifies the operations and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture" (2000, p. 500). But what is this thing that he is calling a network, especially as it is used in such an abstract sense here? "A network," he tells us, "is a set of interconnected nodes… what a node is, concretely speaking, depends on the kind of concrete networks of which we speak" (2000, p. 501). Thus,

before we can understand what our nodes are, we have to understand the kind of network that we are looking at. What we are concerned with for the purposes of this paper are networks of new media technologies, distinctive, we are told, because they are both digital and networked (Howard, 2011, p. 2-6). Electronic communication devices are linked together through a vast network of connections and are regularly used by consumers "to have a significant impact on our political, economic, and cultural lives" (p. 2). Moreover, "digital media artifacts themselves, such as websites and social networking applications, can be meaningful units of analysis and offer good evidence about the structure of social interaction" (p. 2). Also of importance is the sense in which "…the structure of a network provides both capacities and constraints on social action" (p. 5). These observations about the nature of digital media networks provide a good starting point for thinking about how communication in online spaces might be structured according to the governing principles of networks more generally. These media networks facilitate communication that could otherwise be instantiated in a number of ways, and it is important to think about how features of the channel provide affordances for users to express themselves and interact with others uses, especially when it comes to the phenomenon of deliberation.

However, the focus of the present chapter is on the mechanics of how power functions in such networks, and thus I will draw upon Castells' theory of network power to describe structural changes in the networked public sphere that both limit and potentiate its capacity to facilitate productive democratic deliberation. Castells (2011) breaks his theory down into four parts: Networking Power, Networked Power, Network Power, and Network-making Power (p. 773). We'll pay particular attention to the latter two, but all four are worth summarizing briefly.

At the highest level, Networking Power concerns the capacity for the globally-networked "in-crowd" of elites to accumulate resources and restrict or permit access to their networks based on the extent to which actors on the periphery contribute value to the system or jeopardize the overlapping interests of the most well-connected members. From the perspective of Public Sphere Theory, this kind of power is hard to trace at a fine level of detail in discourse, as it presides pervasively, so thoroughly warping communication that it appears from the ordinary perspective of any individual (non-elite) person hardly to operate at all.

Networked Power, on the other hand, is much more fine-grained and specific to particular networks. Much like traditional analyses of power, it describes the ability of some social actors to impose their will over other actors "on the basis of the structural capacity of domination embedded in institutions of society" (p 775). By looking at any particular network, we see how it "…defines its own power relations, depending on its programmed goals" (p. 775). Castells uses the examples of global networks of capital and the military industrial complex to show how the presiding imperatives of the financial system (for example, the International Monetary Fund) and developers of war-making technology enact their will over other members of the network. However, Castells points out that these power-logics only make sense within their respective networks, and as such cannot tell us about how each network interacts with the others, failing to explain how power functions more generally in the globally networked society.

Network power concerns "the standards that enable global coordination," or "the rules to be accepted once in the network" (p. 775). Grewal (2008), cited in Castells (2011), suggests that this dynamic…can lead to the progressive elimination of the alternatives over which otherwise free choice can be collectively exercised… emerging global standards…[provide] the solution to the problem of global coordination among diverse participants but it does so by elevating one

solution above others and threatening the elimination of alternative solutions to the same

problem (p. 775).

Notably, this kind of power bears a strong resemblance to the power that Alexander

Galloway attributes to protocol. Galloway defines protocol as "a technique for achieving

voluntary regulation within a contingent environment" (2004, p. 7). Further establishing the

relationship between protocol and network power, he says that "Protocol's native landscape is

the distributed network," which is "an important *diagram* for our current social formation" (p.

11). "Shared protocols," he continues, "are what defines the landscape of the network—who is

connected to whom" (p. 11). I'll return to protocol power in a moment, but it is important to note

that these two conceptions of power are not just related, but intrinsically co-constructing.

Protocol is required for networks to function through establishment of conditions for the

formation of relationships between nodes (communication), and at the same time networks bring

protocol into being and determine its developmental logics.

Returning to Castells, we come to what he considers to be the crucial form of power

operating in the network society, which is Network-making Power. This power refers to the

ability to exercise control over others based on two mechanisms:

(a) the ability to constitute network(s) and to program/ reprogram the network(s) in terms of the

goals assigned to the network; and (b) the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of

different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources while fending off

competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation. (Castells, 2011, p. 776)

He calls the holders of the first kind "programmers," and holders of the second kind "switchers."

Switchers establish connections between networks, wielding power over admission and ejection.

As Castells (2000) discusses in the conclusion to *The Rise of the Network Society*, there is a

fundamental binary value at the core of the concept of the network. Either there is zero distance

between elements of a network, which is to say that they can in principle communicate with any

other member, or there is infinite distance, in which an external node (which need not be seen as

an individual, as nodes may represent black-boxed networks) can never establish a relationship

with any member inside the dominant network (2000, p. 500). Castells also says that "…switches

connecting… networks are privileged instruments of power" (2000, p. 502). With this in mind,

we can begin to see how this form of power relates to political authority and the public sphere.

According to Howard's recapitulation of Castells' work, "media have become the public sphere,"

which is to say that they compose "the space in which people discuss cultural values, compose

solutions to shared problems, and implement collective projects (2011, p. 39-40). Access to

media networks determines who receives what information, what they can do with that

information, and ultimately, who gets a say in what it means for the public's collective interests.

Another way of putting this is that the publicity of salient information and discourse is regulated

rather than free, and it is regulated by those who prioritize their private interests (and those of

their confederates) over the interests of the public. Thus, those who are truly excluded from the

networked public sphere are rendered silent, violating the inclusive requirements of Public

Sphere Theory as a democratic ideal. Similarly, the power to program a network, which is to say,

the ability to provide or select linkages within a network, determines parity of participation,

suggesting that bare inclusion in the network is insufficient for truly inclusive participation.

There's plenty more that can be said about network-making power, but for now let's turn

to protocol power as instantiated by algorithms. Algorithms need not always manifest protocol

power, but I think there is a strong case to be made for the ways in which public relevance

algorithms, defined by Tarleton Gillespie (2014) as those algorithms which we use "…to select

what is most relevant from a corpus of data composed of traces of our activities, preferences, and

expressions" (p. 131), act protocologically through what Galloway calls "collaborative filtering"

(2004, p. 114). In collaborative filtering, "personal identity is formed only on certain hegemonic

patterns. In this massive algorithmic collaboration, the user is always suggested to be like

someone else… Collaborative filtering is a set of rules based on a pool of user dispositions that

affects each member of the pool" (p. 114). Gillespie (2014) identifies six ways in which public

relevance algorithms have political consequences: 1) patterns of inclusion, 2) cycles of

anticipation, 3) the evaluation of relevance, 4) the promise of algorithmic objectivity, 5)

entanglement with practice, and 6) the production of calculated publics (p. 132). These lead us

progressively into thinking about the ways in which algorithms contribute to the third and final

conception of power, the power of hegemonic publicness.

As noted above, patterns of inclusion are intrinsically related to the forms of network-

making power, except in this case, we are concerned with how information is systematically

included or excluded from the network of relevant results. Thus, an important way in which

public relevance algorithms structure public sphere discourse is epistemic. Knowledge

production and curation logics determine what kinds of information users have available to them

in addition to providing a credentialing function for the information they are served as the results

of search engine queries. The ideal of rational-critical discourse in public sphere theory relies

upon informed participants that share common sources of information which can be publicly

inspected for accuracy and relevance to the questions at hand.

However, the ideal of public inspection and transparency is not easily met, especially as

"…authority is increasingly expressed algorithmically" (Pasquale, 2015, p. 8). In Frank

Pasquale's (2015) book *The Black Box Society*, he discusses the ways in which "black boxed"

algorithms do the heavy lifting in terms of authenticating facts and establishing relevance. To black box a technology is to render its inner workings opaque, seeing only the input and output, the before and after states. When search engines such as Google employ complex algorithms to yield results, users are increasingly kept "in the dark" regarding what factors go into suggestions. Oftentimes, these suggestions are informed by the collaborative filtering discussed above; previous search histories are stored, analyzed, and repackaged into predictive instruments. While these instruments can often help users get to the information that they want quickly, it is not entirely clear that the relationship between desired outcomes and use of the tool is unidirectional. Search engines profile users based on their previous entries and then use those profiles to sell products to others with similar habits. In this way, satisfaction with the appropriateness of search results is often a manufactured reaction according to the imperatives of advertisers and purveyors of digital entertainment. Under these conditions, it is clear how communication in the political public sphere could be systematically distorted by those with the skills to develop algorithms and the state/market interests with the money to employ them for their ends.

The Hegemonic "Public"

Now that we have laid the theoretical groundwork for understanding network-making and protocol power, we can finally see how these two aid in the hegemonic projection of the dominant culture as the singular, legitimate public referred to by the phrase "the public sphere." Network power puts definite bounds on access to public discourse, both in terms of who gets to speak, who gets to listen, and whether or not responses are allowed. Similarly, protocol power, instantiated in visibility and relevance algorithms, make the experience of participating in public discourse dramatically different between users and over time, especially regarding access to ordering of discourse in online spaces. This last point is worth reflecting on in relation to our

everyday online practices on social media. Sorting algorithms determine to a significant extent how content becomes visible to users, and platforms such as Facebook are particularly opaque in terms of revealing how these algorithms function. Platforms like Reddit are more explicit about their visibility mechanisms (the upvote/downvote system is a major part of the platform), but at the same time they do employ collapsing of lesser-ranked comments, creating a particular presentation of conversations that has implications for the way in which discourse unfolds. Each encounter with a particular page may result in a different presentation, meaning that not all of us are watching the same conversation unfold. In a certain sense, can it even be said that we are hardly having the same conversation at all? At the very least, I think it is fair to say that the version of the conversation that most of us see is a mixture of the most popular comments and comments made by those most adept at using the platform. Filtering for either of these traits seems likely to allow a certain kind of dominant form of participation to surface, suppressing other forms in the process.

Both of the above-listed effects have implications for the analytic concept of the public, in that the temporality and scope of circulation are crucially important for public sphere theory. As the aforementioned theory has developed over time, many have noted that the dominant culture has claimed its participatory preferences to be the guiding and constitutive norms for deliberation in the public sphere. Insofar as deliberation plays a legitimating role in democratic governance, the strategic coalescing of networks as *the* public and algorithmic control over fact-finding and truth-arbitrating privilege certain participants over others and thus afford them a larger role in governance, violating core principles of the theory.

This gives us an opportunity to return once again to protocol power, insofar as it also functions in a much more abstract sense than simply being instantiated in relevance algorithms;

conceived of fundamentally as "…any type of correct or proper behavior within a specific system of conventions" (Galloway, 2004, p. 7), the requirements for discourse to be considered "reasoned" can themselves be seen as an instance of protocol power. One way of thinking about reason is as set of procedures that define good thinking. While philosophers have in large part considered it their privileged domain to arbitrate what this set of procedures amounts to and how it relates to "Truth," theorists of power such as Foucault put forward the suggestion that "'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements" (2010, p. 74). This seems to indicate that protocol power plays a major role in determining the procedures for establishing the truth of knowledge claims, and that this power is part of what it is for a dominant culture to be able to establish its preferred procedures for reasoning not simply as some contingent set of rules, but as the only conceivable way to think rightly. Interestingly, this also brings us full-circle *back* to algorithms as the procedures of thought for thinking machines. Computers (at least of the traditional variety—I leave aside non-deterministic and non-representational models of machine intelligence) operate mechanistically according to rules for transforming symbols. A computer is a perfect reasoner insofar as it will not deviate from the instructions one gives it. I suggest that this relationship between reason, truth, and rigid adherence to procedures for good thinking is responsible for some of the technological culture that places a great deal of trust in algorithms for solving problems that we humans as imperfect thinkers cannot seem to handle.

One particularly salient example of this trend that is also relevant for considerations of political issues discussed in the public sphere is the way in which algorithms can be appealed to in order to solve the problem of partisan gerrymandering. Carlos Waters (2017) of Vox.com writes that "We are living in the era of the computer algorithm…for many people, an algorithm

will play a role in everything from what news articles they read to whom they will date — or even marry. So it's no surprise that political scientists would want to use an algorithm to improve political redistricting." Similarly, Daniel Oberhaus (2017) of Vice.com reports that "…the past decade has been something of a renaissance era for algorithmic redistricting. Take, for example, Bdistricting or Auto-Redistrict, two free open source programs that can be used to generate ostensibly fair, unbiased congressional districts without requiring a supercomputer." While the latter author is more skeptical of the objectivity of algorithms, both authors point to oft-cited research by Tam Cho and Liu (2016) into ways in which algorithmic processes can be used to develop a fair and impartial system for determining legislative redistricting so as to overcome partisan gerrymandering and election results which are not representative of public opinion.

On the other hand, thinking about these kinds of power also allows us to develop concepts of counterpower in terms of tactical subversion of algorithmic processes and creative formation of counter-public networks. Excluded *because* they jeopardize the imperatives of the dominant culture, counterpublics become attractive forums for solidarity based on marginalization, and they horde a resource which is often underappreciated: danger to the system. It is precisely because of their double-mindedness about the norms they are supposed to adhere to and the norms they have self-consciously adopted that they become adept at evasively navigating the systems which seek to control them through the aforementioned kinds of power.

Returning to the technological aspect, theorists such as Dahlberg have considered the extent to which "the Internet is seen as a force for 'radical democracy'" (2007, p. 56). He tells us that "The Internet is seen as helping marginalized groups – those groups associated with discourses excluded from the mainstream public sphere – develop their own deliberative forums, link up, and subsequently contest dominant meanings and practices" (p. 56). Thus, they can resist

the power of the dominant public to establish its preferred forms of participation as the norms

governing participation more generally.

Resistance to protocol power is, I think, tied closely with the dialectical tension that

Christopher Kelty (2014) discusses between positive and negative liberty and the relationship

that these concepts bare to the uses of technology. Insofar as protocols allow a "freedom to" find

the information that we want quickly and efficiently, they are also somewhat paternalistic in that

they only really offer what the system decides is most rational to desire. Counterpower in regards

to protocol involves creative and at times inefficient navigation of information systems. It also

requires users to "prod" the black box and systematically develop a sense for the kinds of

tendencies that algorithms have for sorting data and making information visible.

I see this kind of counterpower as similar to the kind that Feenberg identifies in the work of

Michel de Certeau. Feenberg tells us that "De Certeau defines 'strategies' as institutionalized

controls embodied in modern social organizations such as corporations or agencies" (1999, p.

112). In relation to these strategies, de Certeau also defines forms of resistance which he calls

"tactics." "Tactics," he says, "…differ from outright opposition in that they subvert dominant

codes from within by introducing various unexpected delays, combinations, and ironies into the

application of strategies" (p. 113). The forms that this kind of resistance take in public sphere

discourse are hard to pin down, but I suggest that various forums for online discussion provide

clues for how this happens. When Reddit users reappropriate the "karma" (a credentialing

mechanic) and the upvote/downvote systems (related to karma, but also involved in visibility) for

the purposes of avoiding moderation or detecting bots and/or trolls, they show the potential to

resist the protocols embedded in their preferred online space. It is difficult to describe in further

detail such tactics, as a fundamental feature is their spontaneity. Should they become

generalized, they become reintegrated into the system and lose their efficacy.

Finally, Castells himself gives us a theory of counterpower in relation to his network

theory of power (2011). He says that "resistance to power is achieved through the same two

mechanisms that constitute power in the network society: the programs of the networks and the

switches between networks" (2011, p. 778). Thus, the struggle is always between holders of

these capacities to "introduce new instructions and new codes into the networks' programs" and

"blocking the switches of connection between networks that allow the networks to be controlled

by the metaprogram of values that express structural domination" (p. 778). By metaprogram, he

refers to the "source code" (codes and programs in both phrases are to be interpreted both

literally and metaphorically) required to generate organizations and institutions that structure

interactions. For the case of programming power, we can use the example of reprogramming the

norms governing public sphere discourse. By considering the requirements for rational-critical

discourse as contingent rather than necessary, fallible rather than foundational, and always

subject to the process which they simultaneously govern, resistance can be played out by

allowing new and different kinds of reason and expression than were permitted before. For the

case of switching power, Castells gives the example of campaign finance reform, such that

resistance to power can be instantiate by switching off the connection between wealthy donors

and political elites (2011, p. 778).

I have sought to show in this chapter how three different forms of power, each bearing a

special relationship to information communication technologies, are actually intrinsically

related—that one of the four forms of network power is, in fact, essentially protocol power; that

protocol power is always instantiated in networks, and that all networks rely upon protocol for

their existence; that publics interact with one another in multi-layered media networks with varying access and connection logics; and that dominant publics employ the protocols that govern good reasoning and information relevance in order to maintain a hegemony over the kinds of information and discourse permitted in deliberative processes. If the task of understanding how deliberative democracy can be performed in online spaces depends upon identifying power relations and accounting for the ways in which they can both facilitate and warp communication, then this chapter's arguments are intended to aid in that endeavor.

Chapter 5:

Empirical Inquiry of the Networked Public Sphere

As discussed in earlier chapters, online deliberation and the relationship it bears to the health of democracy are the central foci of this thesis. Having established the theory behind deliberative democracy and the concept of the public sphere, it is now time to extend that theory to empirical applications for studying how online deliberation concerning political topics actually unfolds. First, let's recapitulate the most salient theoretical points. According to Fraser, the public sphere "…designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (1990, p. 57). As such, it can arise through both face-to-face and mediated communication environments. We are looking at those discussions which occur through computer mediated communication, broadly defined so as to include digital communication technologies such as mobile phones. Furthermore, some of the discussions had in the public sphere fall under the heading of political deliberation, in which persons share their reasons for holding certain positions regarding public policy, attitudes toward public institutions, and advocacy for programs of action. Deliberation is importantly related to the concept of the public sphere, as the scrutiny afforded by making opinions public results in a rigorous testing and critique of ideas, a back and forth exchange in which we (the public) not only attempt to reach a consensus about what we think on some particular matter, but indeed will be compelled to act in harmony upon that consensus when it is reached. There is a dual conception here that I have referred to in earlier chapters; namely, that one the on hand there are empirical descriptions of the public sphere as it actually exists and on the other there are normative ideals which accompany the conception of the public sphere as it

relates to principles of democratic self-governance. The normative conception requires extensive

deliberation, guided by a regulative ideal which includes norms such as those discussed in

Chapters 2 and 3. One way of thinking about the relationship between the normative conception

of the public sphere and the empirical conception is to clearly articulate the norms that govern

the quality of deliberation, identify empirical indicators that those norms are being satisfied, and

then study certain public communication environments in order to determine whether they are

ideally deliberative or not. The following empirical work is one small iteration of this project.

Operationalizing Deliberation: Pilot Testing for Content Analysis

According to Halpern and Gibbs (2013), who studied differences in the quality of

deliberation between Facebook and Youtube[2], deliberation "refers to a particular sort of

discussion between at least two individuals in which (1) the form of communication emphasizes

the use of logic and reasoning instead of power or coercion, (2) this reasoned engagement

focuses on a social or political issue through which participants are able to identify solutions to a

common problem, and (3) individuals are open to opinions and ideas expressed by others, and at

the same time the communication between them is governed by rules of equality, symmetry and

civility" (p. 1160). Earlier, I called such rules "deliberative norms." Prominent public sphere

scholar Lincoln Dahlberg defines these norms as "a set of ideal requirements of public sphere

discourse…needed in order to determine the extent to which online deliberations are facilitating

rational- critical discourse and to identify any factors inhibiting an extension of such

communication" (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 622). Using Habermas' work, Dahlberg has developed the

following list of norms: "Exchange and critique of reasoned moral-practical validity claims",

"Reflexivity", "Ideal role taking", "Sincerity", "Discursive inclusion and equality", "Autonomy

---

[2] Both of these sites qualify under the header of "social media", described by Ellison and Vitak (2015, p.205) as "a set of features and tools that enable peer-to-peer communication in ways not supported by mass media…".

from state and economic power" (2001, p.623). Thus, while Halpern and Gibbs are oriented towards a descriptive approach, they are using definitions of deliberation which are fairly close to the ideal conception that this thesis mostly concerns itself with.

Though each norm identified in earlier chapters contributes to the overall health of deliberation, this exploratory study will look at civility and thoughtfulness. While many explications of civility can be found in the literature, I have combined features of two particularly salient definitions from both the Halpern and Gibbs study mentioned above (2013) and Coe, Kenski, and Rains (2014). Civility can be understood as the extent to which "participants promoted respect for individuals as members of groups, political associations or any other collectivity" (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013, p. 1163). However, studying online discussions for the presence of civility is difficult, largely because it acts as a prerequisite for an idealized kind of discourse. Instead, it seems fruitful to study violations of this virtue. Instances in which civility is not observed can be considered to be incivil. Incivility, then, picks out those "features of discussion that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone toward the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics" (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014, p. 660). While civility may be a virtue that arises out of cultural-historical circumstances, and it is likely observed for multiple reasons, many of which have to do with interpersonal or relational imperatives, I suggest that we should also see it as a precondition for what Gastil called "respectful consideration" (2008, p.8). Similarly, it relates to Dahlberg's "Ideal role taking" norm, which he sees satisfied when "participants… attempt to understand the argument from the other's perspective. This requires a commitment to an ongoing dialogue with difference in which interlocutors respectfully listen to each other" (2001, p. 623).

It is from the work of Halpern and Gibbs (2013) and Coe, Kenski, and Rains (2014) that I have selected the following types of incivility for study: Name-Calling, Accusations of Lying, Aspersions, Vulgarity, and Pejorative Speech[3] . The presences of any one of these types in a comment is sufficient to classify that comment as "incivil," while a count of the presence of different types of incivility is used to create a measure of the extent to which a comment is incivil.

Regarding thoughtfulness of comments, I drew inspiration from the work of Sukumaran, Vezich, Mchugh, and Nass et al. (2011). The authors of this study identified "a 'high-thoughtful' type which was about 50 words long and offered elaborated arguments and insightful ideas relevant to the article; and a 'low-thoughtful' type which was about 15 words long and expressed banal or poorly reasoned opinions" (p. 3404). The concept of thoughtfulness was not explicated in great detail in this piece, and as such I developed it further, thinking of thoughtfulness as the extent to which a comment indicates that its creator put thought into crafting it. Insightfulness, relevance to the context of the conversation, expenditure of mental effort, and depth of reasoning are indicators of thoughtfulness. Instead of using a bi-valent condition, I instead developed a 10-point scale, with 1 being "not thoughtful at all" and 10 being "extremely thoughful." An extremely thoughtful comment contained all of the following qualities:

A) Insightful, relevant content

B) Intentional effort to craft

C) Evidence of complexity of ideas, significant engagement with other users' comments, and/or sourcing of claims

---

[3] Initially, this study also included "Stereotyping." As shown in Table 1, I was unable to reach acceptable intercoder reliability levels to report on this sub-variable, and it was subsequently removed from the analysis.

Comments which were not thoughtful at all contained none of these qualities, and all values between contained various combinations of these qualities to varying degrees. Given the extent to which this measure differs from the established measure used in previous studies, it is a minor goal of the present study to develop this concept and validate a new operationalization. I suggest that the acceptable inter-coder reliability coefficient achieved for the thoughtfulness variable is an indication that I have been at least somewhat successful in this regard (see Table 1). As with civility, thoughtfulness is not in itself among those norms identified as constitutive of ideal democratic deliberation. Rather, it is a precondition of the kind of robust participation required of by several of the norms. Critical reasoning requires time and concerted effort, and communicating one's thinking (that is to say, reasoning through communication) can hardly be done well through frivolous, low-effort participation. Furthermore, exchange of reasons requires consideration of the views already expressed and engagement with a shared body of evidence. Recall the conditions that Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague gave us for undistorted communication, namely, that it allows recipients to "*readily*, *confidently*, and *accurately* perceive the intent of the sender" (2004). I argue that a lack of thoughtfulness is a kind of systematic distortion which restricts the capacity for participants to effectively communicate clear political opinions. I have therefore built these requirements into the concept of thoughtfulness and the subsequent coding scheme to capture a dimension of the content which exemplifies this cognitive effort.

In this study, these two primary measures (incivility and thoughtfulness) are most often considered to be the dependent variables, being influenced by the various features of the platform. However, they are also theorized to be independent variables, as when considering user-feedback driven visibility. For comparative purposes, these various features should be

understood as properties of what Deen Freelon calls "discourse architecture" (2015). According to Freelon, "Distinct discourse architectures can be thought of as packages of technological characteristics that work together to enable and constrain different norms of democracy. Such characteristics include whether users can pre-select desired content, the amount of text they are allowed to enter per post, the presence of "reply" features, and the ability to filter or report offensive behavior" (Freelon, 2015, p. 776). For my purposes in comparing Facebook and Reddit, I have further developed the concept of "reply" structure as well as two other aspects of discourse architecture: identifiability of participation and user-feedback driven visibility mechanisms.

The reply structure of post-and-comment type content refers to how content is grouped and accessed on the site. In Facebook's case, the primary unit of interest for this study are comments to posts. This platform allows for only a single order of replies. Thus, a comment can either be original (value = 0) or a first-order reply (value = 1). All replies to a comment after the first are listed chronologically and without further distinction, even if the user intended their comment to be a reply to a reply.

The corresponding unit on Reddit to a post is a "thread" on a sub-reddit. Within these threads users can comment on the initial thread content and reply to other comments. The difference here is that replies extent beyond the first order. For conceptual purposes, I'll assume that the maximum reply order is arbitrarily large. Thus, comments can either be original (value = 0) or a reply of order x, where x is the number of parent comments to which the reply is attached. For example, a reply to a reply would have a value of 2. For this study, the reply aspect of discourse architecture is collapsed into a simple binary nominal value for each comment: reply or

not-reply. This allows us to see how comments differ in terms of incivility based on whether or

not they were an original comment or a reply, leading us to:

RQ1A: How does the reply level of comments affect the extent to which comments are incivil?

RQ1B: How does the reply level affect the presence of incivility of a comment?

RQ1C: How does reply level affect the thoughtfulness of comments?

Identifiability of participation is theorized as a spectrum that ranges from entirely

anonymous, in which participation does not involve any degree of identifiability of the person

performing the actions to entirely identifiable, in which participation requires significant

disclosure of personal information and the satisfaction of authentication procedures by the person

performing the actions. In between these extremes are various forms of pseudonymity that

involve a persistent and recognizable identity across acts of participation. Facebook is theorized

to lie at the entirely identifiable end, while Reddit is theorized closer to the middle of the

spectrum. Examples of identifiability include a registered username attached to comments,

reasonably accessible posting history, profile pictures, and public-facing biographical

information. Ideally, this variable uses a ratio level of measurement (true zero means no

identifiable information is given) but is here collapsed into a binary nominal measure that simply

names the platform, Facebook or Reddit, assuming general uniformity of identifiability across

participation. Research on the effects of identifiability on incivility has been performed by Ian

Rowe in his 2015 article "Civility 2.0: a comparative analysis of incivility in online political

discussion." It is on the basis of Rowe's findings and the findings of Halpern & Gibbs (2013)

that I develop a provision hypothesis:

H1: The more identifiable the participation is, the less incivil the comments will be.

One way of expressing this hypothesis in the theoretical terms of previous chapters is that the

more public participation is, the less likely it is to be incivil. This is because incivility is exposed

to the scrutiny of the public, and as such the speaker is subject to the criticisms of their peers.

They can be held responsible for the speech, and as such will attempt to adhere to a value which,

among other things, acts as a precondition for the satisfaction of deliberative norms (even if they

don't constrain themselves *in* virtue of respect for this norm. Similar expectations might hold for

thoughtfulness, and it is therefore tested, but it seems less likely that this would be the case. Lack

of thoughtfulness in comments is less likely to be criticized like incivility would be. This

hypothesis is tested indirectly by comparing the population of comments from Facebook with the

population of comments from Reddit, given how each platform instantiates different levels of

identifiable participation, as indicated by:

RQ2A: Do Facebook and Reddit differ in terms of the presence of incivility in comments?

RQ2B: Do Facebook and Reddit differ in terms of the extent of incivility in comments?

RQ2C: Do Facebook and Reddit differ in terms of thoughtfulness of comments?

Finally, user-feedback driven visibility mechanics are understood as those features of a

platform that determine how the visibility of content is affected by user feedback. Facebook uses

the "likes" system to increase the visibility of comments by default settings for comment

viewing, though this can be manually altered. Reddit uses an "upvoting" and "downvoting"

system, where the most highly upvoted comments and threads are given greater visibility, while

heavily downvoted comments receive decreased visibility to a maximum of utter censorship.

While these two systems are theoretically different, they have similar implications for the more

general function of organizing content for visibility based (in some part) upon how users

responded to that content, where the responses are also visible to other users. This leads us to

our third set of research questions:

RQ3A: Does the presence of incivility in comments affect user feedback-driven visibility scores?

RQ3B: Is there a relationship between extent of incivility and user feedback-driven visibility

scores?

RQ3C: Is there a relationship between thoughtfulness and user-feedback-driven visibility scores?

Finally, I develop a research question which relates the two variables which act as preconditions

for deliberative norms to hold. This kind of question is valuable for assessing how some

preconditions influence others; in this specific case, that means asking whether incivility

comments might be less thoughtful, as stated in the following research question:

RQ4: Are incivil comments less thoughtful?

Given the complexity of these relations, I have made the following table to map the

research questions as they relate to each variable. The arrows go in the direction of independent

variable to dependent variable, and are bi-directional in the case of hypothesized relationships
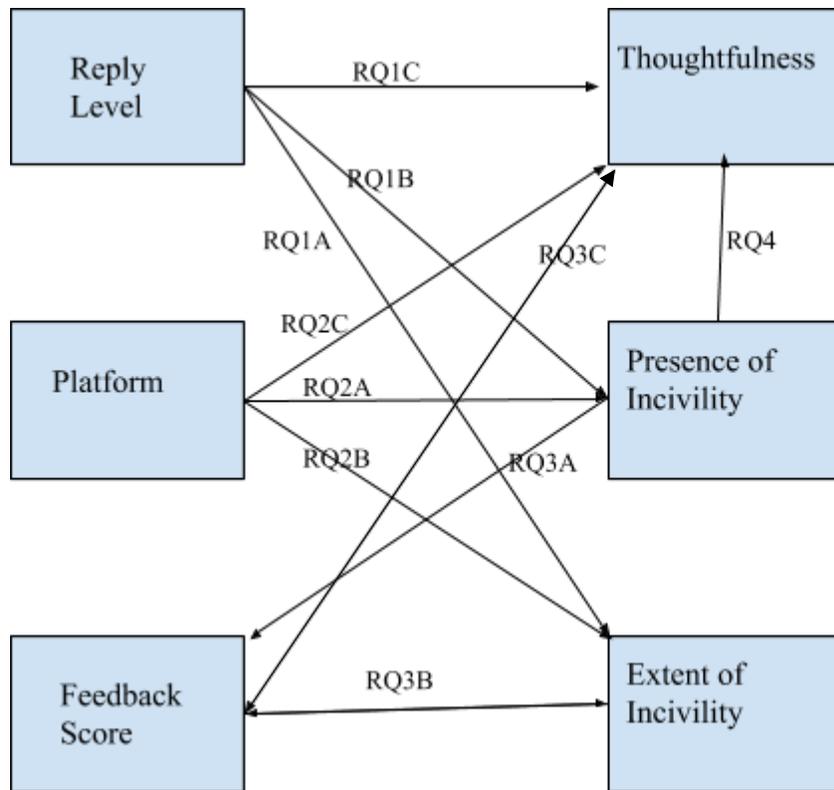
(tests of correlation).

Figure 1. Model of Relationships between variables and RQs.

Methods and Procedures

Two methods were conducted simultaneously in order to answer the previously noted research questions, as well as several others which arose organically during the investigation. The first method is quantitative content analysis, defined in *The Content Analysis Guidebook* as "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf, 2017, p.. 1). This method takes a post-positivist/ social scientific orientation, in that it seeks to apply statistical analysis to quantified properties of communication artifacts in order to answer questions concerning those artifacts. Concepts (such as civility and thoughtfulness) are explicated (Chaffee, 1991), operationalized and developed into a codebook, which is then applied to the messages being analyzed such that each unit is "coded" as possessing certain

properties. Some properties are manifest, meaning that they are obvious based on fairly

straightforward criteria (for example, the word "dog" is 3 letters long), while other properties are

latent, and require a significant amount of interpretation (Neuendorf, 2017, p.31). The second

method is Critical Discourse Analysis, explained later in the section under that heading.

Both methods were conducted on posts to Facebook and Reddit that contain an embedded

video of a White House press briefings from the tenure of current White House Press Secretary,

Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Specifically, this study looks at posts to the Facebook page of Q13

Fox, a local television news station serving the Seattle metropolitan area as well as posts to the

subreddit r/politics. They are intended to represent the larger population of posts concerning

these press briefings on both sites. White House press briefings are interesting because they

occur regularly, represent an (apparently) vetted and official message from the executive branch

of the US government, and as such almost always concern explicitly political matters. It is

reasonable, then, to expect public comment on such posts to be relevant to studies of political

deliberation. Furthermore, White House press briefings exemplify a particularly important

interaction between the public, as represented by the press, and the state, as represented by the

White House press secretary. This can be understood as the "representational" dimension of

democracy's communication spaces (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 149) In a sense, the media distills the

concerns of the public and communicates them to a representative of the highest office in the

country, the presidential administration. Then, the press secretary formulates an official answer

for the administration, which is then reported on through various media outlets. The output of the

media makes its way into what Dahlgren calls the "interactional" dimension (p. 149), which we

see in this thesis in the form of comments on Reddit about these press briefings.

However, this is where things get tricky. Many of the theoretical concerns addressed in earlier chapters manifest themselves in the form of methodological difficulties when it comes to public sphere research. One major difficulty is identifying where the boundaries lie between the public and the private, especially in an age where persistent channels of communication are also highly-visible. This leads us to our second major difficulty, which is that the distinction between interpersonal communication and mass broadcasting has become blurred. Communication scholars such as O'Sullivan & Carr (2017) provide a model of communication which bridges the divide between interpersonal and mass communication, which they term the Masspersonal Communication Model (p. 1165). This model "conceptualizes interpersonal, mass, and masspersonal communication as related forms of communication distinguished by their variation on two dimensions: (a) perceived exclusivity of message access and (b) message personalization" (p. 1165). The third difficulty is that communicative behaviors and preferences span multiple channels, with some performances fluidly meandering between platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit and in turn influencing more conventional forms of communication such as face-to-face conversations with friends, family, and peers. Research in any particular space is bound to be limited by these problems and many others, and as such I suggest a special kind of integrated methods[4] approach which I have termed "transparently iterative mixed methods."

The methods employed are transparent in two ways: 1) results are "layered" such that each stage is visible in the final product and 2) The research process is well-documented, reported upon, and reflected on at each stage. It is iterative in Derrida's sense of the word: "In

---

[4] I am indebted to Dr. Emily Ignacio for this term.

the process of repeating a term or concept, we never simply reproduce a replica of the original

usage and its intended meaning: rather, every repetition…transforms meaning, adds to it,

enriches it in ever-so-subtle ways. In fact, there really is no "originary" source of meaning"

(Benhabib, 2006, p. 47). I especially situate this methodological approach in the supposed gulf

between quantitative methods and qualitative methods. I propose that qualitative methods can be

used to generate and validate the concepts that inform the categories employed in quantitative

research, and that quantitative research can be employed to test intuitions and suggest tentative

conclusions which can then focus the attention of the researcher on the most salient patterns for

further qualitative inquiry. This process is repeated, both within the scope of the same study and

across studies, in order to give both a rich description of the observed phenomena and flexibility

to extend one's conclusions to other circumstances. It is both ideographic and quasi-nomothetic,

in that it describes particularities and offers generalizability (but not in the form of "laws" of

human nature).

I suggest that this approach helps us to deal with the aforementioned problems by

offering us the toolboxes of both camps, quantitative and qualitative, without limiting ourselves

to keeping the results of each quarantined to answering their own questions. In the present

example, I employ quantitative content analysis to test intuitions about the nature of online

political discourse using categories drawn from theory. However, in the process of conducting

this analysis, I held a number of sessions with my coder in order to deliberate about the

meaningfulness of the categories and the applicability of the coding protocol to the materials. As

such, I was not merely training them, but learning from them as well about the qualities of the

material through collaboration. In addition, as I coded a portion of the data for intercoder

reliability (see next section), I took notes for the critical discourse analysis, developing a sense

for the relationship between the quantitative categories and the other non-tested aspects of the

discourse. In the course of this process, I was able to identify other spaces and conversations that

would be fruitful for further research and would help to illuminate the complex production of

publicity.

Content Analysis Procedures

Comments are the unit of analysis for the content analysis section of this study. The

sample frame is that of a single post to Q13 Fox or r/politics with an embedded White House

press briefing video as its primary content. Three posts from the Facebook page and two posts

from the subreddit were collected for analysis, making for a total of five sub-samples

constituting a total sample of 1,117 messages. The samples are compared based upon the three

properties of interest discussed above: discourse architecture, civility, and thoughtfulness. For

the former, identifiability of participation, comment/reply structure, and user-feedback-driven

visibility are the concepts being measured. Violations of the virtue of civility are measured in

terms of the five different kinds of incivility discussed above. Finally, a thoughtfulness condition

was measured on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being "not at all thoughtful" and 10 being "extremely

thoughtful."

To determine the validity of the coding scheme, reliability assessments between coder

responses were conducted using Krippendorff's Alpha as the intercoder reliability coefficient

due to its ability to account for chance agreement and accommodate more than two coders.

Intercoder reliability is a test of the extent to which a codebook can be employed by any coder

with relatively similar results, such that subjective interpretations not relevant to the

phenomenon of interest do not enter into the analysis. It is evaluated by having two or more

coders assess an appropriately large subset of the sample, and then applying intercoder reliability

tests such as Krippendorff's Alpha (above) to produce a coefficient for each coding category to determine its suitability for further research.

This study employed two coders including the author of this study. The coders were trained, debriefed, and re-trained over the course of three one-hour sessions.[5] Coders assessed the comments associated with one post from Q13 Fox's Facebook and one thread from the subreddit r/politics for the presence of the six kinds of incivility listed above as well as an "other" category for instances of incivility which did not fit any other category. The combined population of sample comments amounted to n=402. The results of the pilot test are given below:

Table 1

Inter-coder reliability alphas, number of agreements, total number of identified instances, and percent agreement for each category of Incivility

Category	α	Agreements	Total	Percent
Extent of Incivility	0.692	322	N/A[a]	80.09%
Presence of Incivility	0.705	350	260	87.06%
Name-Calling	0.507	378	16	94.02%
Aspersions	0.482	299	149	74.37%
Accusations of Lying	0.885	396	56	98.50%
Vulgarity	0.817	390	72	97.01%
Pejorative Speech	0.629	393	25	97.76%
Stereotyping	0.134	381	25	94.77%

[a]Extent of Incivility is a ratio measure, and as such the total is not a meaningful value in relation to the totals for other categories.

The above results indicate that, of those variables and sub-variables tested, only "Accusations of

---

[5] The final coding protocol and codebook are available from the author upon request.

Lying" and "Vulgarity" have intercoder coefficients (α) acceptable for substantive statistical

analysis and substantive conclusions at >0.8, according to Krippendorff's suggested standards

(2013, p. 325). "Extent of Incivility," "Presence of Incivility," and "Pejorative speech" are

acceptable for use in exploratory studies with a value between 0.6 and 0.8. "Name-calling" and

"Aspersions" are below but near the threshold of acceptability, and with further training one

would expect them to improve to a level at which they are useful measures. Finally,

"Stereotyping" was far below an acceptable coefficient and would require significant reworking

for further studies. As a result of Stereotyping's deficient α, Extent of Incivility and Presence of

Incivility were recalculated accounting for the exclusions of this unreliably coded variable. The

reported intercoder reliabilities in Table 1 reflect this decision, as does the following analysis.

Data Analysis

After the sample of n=402 was tested for intercoder reliability, the responses from the

primary coder (not the author of this study) were used to populate the following frequency table

describing the aggregate data collected for both Facebook and Reddit samples. All subsequent

statistical analyses were based on this coder's responses, totaling n=1117 comments in all.

Table 2

Total Sample Frequencies and Means for Presence of Incivility, Reply Level, and Platform in terms of Extent of Incivility,

Feedback Score, and Thoughtfulness

Category	Frequency	Feedback μ	Feedback σ	Extent of Incivility μ	Extent of Incivility σ	Thoughtfulness μ	Thoughtfulness σ
Presence of Incivility	354	2.41	5.88	N/A	N/A	2.70	1.32
No Incivility	763	2.16	3.44	.N/A	.N/A	1.89	1.37
Reply	438	1.76	3.57	0.340	0.642	2.95	1.37
Not Reply	679	2.55	4.78	0.456	0.710	2.51	1.28

Facebook	510	1.23	2.36	0.523	0.727	2.52	1.39
Reddit	607	3.09	5.36	0.316	0.636	2.82	1.27
N	1117						

The research questions were addressed as follows:

RQ1A: How does the reply level of comments affect the extent to which comments are incivil?

Table 3

Extent of Incivility Means for Reply and Non-Reply Comments

	Reply	Not Reply	*t*	*df*
Extent of Incivility	0.34	0.45	-2.83	998
	(0.64)	(0.71)		

Note. = $p < .005$ Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare extent of incivility of comments in original comment and reply conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for reply (M=0.34, SD=0.64) and not reply (original comment) (M=0.45, SD=0.71) conditions; t (998) =

-2.83, p <0.005. These results suggest that reply level really does have an effect on civility of comments. Specifically, these results suggest that original comments are more incivil than replies.

RQ1B: Are comments that are replies more likely to be civil than original comments?

Table 4

Crosstabulation of Reply Level and Presence of Incivility

Reply Level	Presence of Incivility	No Presence of Incivility	X^2	φ
Is Reply	115	239	96.44	0.293
Is Not Reply	440	239		

Note. = p < 0.005

A chi-squared test was conducted to compare reply level of comment and presence of incivility. The observed distribution of values differed significantly from the expected distribution of values, with X^2(1) = 96.44, φ = .293, p <0.005. These results suggest that reply level really does have an effect on presence of civility in comments. Specifically, these results suggest that original comments are more incivil than replies.

RQ1C: Are comments that are replies more likely to be thoughtful than original comments?

Table 5

Thoughtfulness Means for Reply and Non-Reply Comments

	Reply	Not Reply	*t*	*df*
Thoughtfulness	2.95	2.51	-5.29	887
	(1.37)	(1.28)		

Note. = *p* < .005   Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare thoughtfulness of comments in original comment and reply conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for reply (M=2.95, SD=1.37) and not reply (original comment) (M=2.51, SD=1.28) conditions; t (887) =

-5.29, p <0.005. These results suggest that reply level really does have an effect on thoughtfulness of comments. Specifically, these results suggest that replies are more thoughtful than original comments.

RQ2A: Do Facebook and Reddit differ in terms of the presence of incivility in comments?

Table 6

Crosstabulation of Platform and Presence of Incivility

Platform	Presence of Incivility	No Presence of Incivility	X^2	φ
Facebook	222	288	40.11	0.189
Reddit	154	453		

Note. = p < 0.005

A chi-squared test was conducted to compare platform (Facebook or Reddit) and presence of incivility. The observed distribution of values differed significantly from the expected distribution of values, with X^2(1) = 40.11, φ = .189, p <0.005. These results suggest that platform really does have an effect on presence of civility in comments. Specifically, these results suggest that original comments are more incivil than replies.

As an indirect measure of identifiability of participation, then, the platform made a difference on civility, but not in the way predicted by the hypothesis H1, namely, that Facebook comments would be less incivil than Reddit comments due to the high level of identifiability of

participation. As the data shows, Reddit comments were more likely to contain no incivility than Facebook comments. This is further supported by the next research question:

RQ2B: Do Facebook and Reddit differ in terms of the extent of incivility in comments?

Table 7

Extent of Incivility Means for Facebook and Reddit Conditions

	Facebook	Reddit	*t*	*df*
Extent of Incivility	0.52	0.31	502	1020
	(0.72)	(0.63)		

Note. = *p* < .005   Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare extent of incivility of comments in different platform conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for Facebook (M=0.52, SD=0.72) and Reddit (M=0.31, SD=0.63) conditions; t (1020) = 5.02, p <0.005. These results suggest that platform really does have an effect on civility of comments. Specifically, these results suggest that Facebook comments are, on average, more incivil than Reddit comments. Again, as an indirect measure of identifiability of participation, the hypothesis that more identifiable participation would discourage incivility is not supported. Speculated reasons for this outcome are further discussed in the concluding chapter.

RQ2C: Do Facebook and Reddit differ in terms of the thoughtfulness of comments?

Table 8

Thoughtfulness Means for Reply and Non-Reply Comments

	Reply	Not Reply	*t*	*df*

Thoughtfulness	2.52	2.82	5.02	1045
	(1.39)	(1.27)		

Note. = $p < .005$ Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare thoughtfulness of comments in different platform conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for Facebook (M=2.52, SD=1.39) and Reddit (M=2.82, SD=1.27) conditions; t (1045) = 5.02, p <0.005. These results suggest that platform really does have an effect of thoughtfulness of comments.

RQ3A: Does the presence of incivility in comments affect user feedback-driven visibility scores?

Table 9

Feedback Score Means for Presence of Incivility and No Presence of Incivility Conditions

	Presence of Incivility	No Presence of Incivility	t	df
Feedback Score	2.41	2.16	-0.75	469
	(5.88)	(3.44)		

Note. = *p = 0.44*   Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare user-feedback driven visibility scores in different platform conditions. There was no significant difference in the scores for presence of incivility (M=2.41, SD=5.88) and no presence of incivility (M=2.16, SD=3.44) conditions; t (469) = -0.75, p = 0.44. These results suggest that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that presence of incivility in comments has no effect on user feedback-driven visibility scores.

RQ3B: Is there a relationship between extent of incivility and user feedback-driven visibility

scores?

Table 10

Pearson's R Correlation for Extent of Incivility with Number of Likes

	Feedback Score
Extent of Incivility	0.04

Note. = p = 0.133

A Pearson's R test of correlation was conducted to assess whether a relationship exists

between extent of incivility and user feedback-driven visibility scores. This resulted in an R

value of 0.04, $p = 0.133$. From this, we cannot reject the null hypothesis, which is that no

relationship exists between extent of incivility and user feedback-driven visibility scores. This

supports the conclusion of RQ3A, leading us to believe that incivility and user feedback-driven

visibility scores are not related under these circumstances.

RQ3C: Is thoughtfulness correlated with feedback?

Table 11

Pearson's R Correlation for Extent of Incivility with Number of Likes

	Feedback Score
Thoughtfulness	0.168

Note. = p < 0.005

A Pearson's R test of correlation was conducted to assess whether a relationship exists between thoughtfulness and user feedback-driven visibility scores. This resulted in an R value of 0.168, $p < 0.005$. From this, we can surmise that a slight relationship exists between thoughtfulness and user feedback-driven visibility scores. The tentative conclusion, then, is that thoughtfulness might play a role in how highly rated a comment is according to the platform's feedback mechanism, be it "Likes" on Facebook or "Upvotes" on Reddit.

RQ4: Are comments that are incivil less thoughtful than comments that are civil?

Table 12

Feedback Score Means for Presence of Incivility and No Presence of Incivility Conditions

	Presence of Incivility	No Presence of Incivility	*t*	*df*
Thoughtfulness	2.70	2.68	-0.21	662
	(1.32)	(1.37)		

Note. = *p = 0.82*   Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare thoughtfulness in presence of incivility and no presence of incivility conditions. There was no significant difference in the scores for presence of incivility (M=2.70, SD=1.32) and no presence of incivility (M=2.68, SD=1.37) conditions; t (662) = -0.21, p = 0.82. These results suggest that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that presence of incivility in comments has no effect on thoughtfulness.

Finally, though it was not a research question, the following cross-tabulation table shows the difference between Reddit and Facebook in terms of reply and not-reply (original) comments:

Table 13

Crosstabulation of Platform and Reply Level

Platform	Reply	Not Reply	X^2	φ
Facebook	222	288	174.88	0.395
Reddit	154	453		

Note. = $p < 0.005$

Discussion

The results for RQ1, all of which were statistically significant, seem to point to somewhat of a surprising conjunction of conclusions: that replies are both less likely to contain incivility, that, on average, the extent of incivility is lower, and that, on average, replies were more thoughtful than original comments. In light of previous theorizing, I would offer the tentative explanation that it is the interactive nature of replies that make them more thoughtful and less incivil. In the case of the former, it makes perfect sense, given the operationalization of thoughtfulness. Remember that the paradigmatic "extremely thoughtful" response includes "significant engagement with other users' comments," which would be expected of comments that made use of the reply function of the respective platform that they occurred on. Furthermore, use of the reply function may be indicative of an awareness (on the part of some) that there is a conversation taking place, and that others may hold them responsible for their communicative behavior. I'll return to some of these explanations as I consider the other research questions.

The results for RQ2 were also all statistically significant, and each result pointed to the following conclusion: that comments on Reddit are less likely to contain incivility, that they are less incivil in extent than comments on Facebook, and that comments on Reddit are more

thoughtful than comments on Facebook. As mentioned in Chapter 3, identifiability of participation as an affordance can be theorized to have some effect on communicative behavior. It was hypothesized in H1 that the identifiability of Facebook would deter users from being incivil towards one another, and might encourage thoughtfulness in commenting. This turned out to not be supported. However, this also coheres with what Walther (2011) theorized about hyperpersonalization: that, in the face of uncertainty, users construct idealized versions of their conversational partners.

The results for RQ3 were mixed. Presence of incivility made no difference on feedback score, nor was any relationship found between feedback score and extent of incivility. However, there was a slight but statistically significant relationship between feedback score and thoughtfulness, suggesting that, while incivility is not detrimental or beneficial in terms of the feedback that people provide, thoughtfulness may be, though the direction of that influence is not given by the test (it would, however, be strange for less thoughtful comments to get better feedback.

Finally, RQ4 found that the presence of incivility did not make a difference on thoughtfulness. This was probably to be expected, as clever but incivil comments are fairly likely to be enjoyed by those who agree with them, while thoughtless but civil comments are not particularly interesting for anyone.

Discourse Analysis Procedures

Each of the previous research questions were intended to plumb intuitions generated by theoretical considerations about the nature of online deliberation. The choice of sample, namely, comments made to posts on Facebook and Reddit containing videos of White House press briefings, was made because these comments were expected to involve participants engaged in

political discourse. This participation could be characterized as a kind of digital practice,

understood as "'assemblages' of actions involving tools associated with digital technologies,

which have come to be recognised by specific groups of people as ways of attaining particular

social goals, enacting particular social identities, and reproducing particular sets of social

relationships" (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015, p. 3). While content analysis is explicitly concerned

with the nature of the message, another method is more appropriate when we seek to understand

a broader category of social phenomena that involves more than just properties of particular

messages in isolation: critical discourse analysis. According to Norman Fairclough, a founding

scholar of critical discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (or CDA, for short), is "a form of

critical social analysis" which contributes to this cause by "elucidating how discourse is related

to other social elements (power, ideologies, institutions, etc.) and offering critique of discourse

as a way into wider critique of social reality" (Fairclough, 2017 p. 13). According to Jones, Chik,

and Hafner, discourse "refer[s] to the formal properties of semiotic artefacts that make them

'hold together' as certain types of 'texts'," but can also "refer to the ways people use

language and other semiotic systems to accomplish particular social actions" and "can refer to

broader systems of knowledge which act to regulate what people can say, write or think" (Jones,

Chik, & Hafner, 2015, p. 4) Critical Discourse Analysis, employed in digital settings, focuses on

four things: texts, or "how different technologies… allow us to combine semiotic elements to

form socially recognisable texts that can be used to perform different kinds of socially

recognised actions"; contexts, or "the social and material situations in which texts are

constructed, consumed, exchanged, and appropriated"; actions and interactions, referring to

"what people do with texts, especially what they do with and to each other"; power and ideology,

concerned with "how people use texts to dominate and control others and to create certain 'versions of reality' (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015, p. 4).

However, given the limited scope of the present work, I have decided to focus only on the first two aspects of discourse analysis. One major reason for this is that, based on content alone, the third and fourth focuses of content analysis in digital settings are difficult or impossible to discern. What users do with texts is partially dependent upon how they employ those texts in other contexts. The paradigmatic example would be instances where users read or hear an argument that they like and decide to employ it themselves in other circumstances, modifying for their own purposes. Such uses would require a significantly larger "picture" so to speak of any particular user's online behavior, perhaps best addressed through other qualitative methods such as interviews. In regards to the functioning of power, even more is needed than content and additional behavioral information. Power relations of the sort that Fraser, Warner, and Dahlberg are concerned with, namely, the power to have one's participatory preferences and speech acts raised to the status of constituting "the" public (to the exclusion of other preferences and voices), are impossible to explicate without talking to those who have been excluded, which again requires further study of the "other" spaces. The functioning of publics and counterpublics must be understood relationally, and this requires much more data than has been collected in this study. Similarly, the logistics of networking power and counterpower that Castells talks about requires a significantly more in-depth understanding of the "gatekeeping" mechanisms. Deciding what is and what is not available to the public is often the result of the search and relevance algorithms operating on and between sites, and the actual mechanics of visibility on Facebook are safely guarded industry secrets. As such, the ways in which texts can be used to dominate others also requires a great deal more data than I have collected. With this in mind, I'll proceed

to describe the social-material contexts of the texts studied and give examples of the kinds of content representative of the different categories used in the above analysis.

Before I go into that analysis, however, there is an important note that should be shared with the reader regarding the ethics of online research. Specific comments that are particularly unique or lengthy will not be quoted in their entirety here, as the searchability of content in online spaces would allow for potential identification of persons studied in the course of this research. For the same reason, true usernames are never used. For similar reasons, I have not provided dates for posts which were analyzed, as they also might be used to identify participants. Given the mixed methods orientation of this study, I am not suggesting that these results can or should be replicated, as would be the case with social scientific research. I do not, however expect the quality of the analysis to have suffered for the sake of observing these protective measures.

Facebook

The sample of Facebook comments were posted to the Facebook page of Q13 Fox, a local news channel serving the Seattle metropolitan area. Immediately, this tells us that the context of this study should be understood to be geographically limited, and that participation might look very much different in other contexts. In addition, all content is aimed at English-speaking audiences. Facebook, as mentioned earlier, is a social networking site that requires registration and requests of its users (though this is not always reinforced) that they make a single authentic profile for personal use, reserving non-personal profiles for use by businesses and other organizations. Facebook can be accessed by computer, tablet, video game console, or mobile device, though the first and last elements of that list probably constitute the most common uses. Facebook's focus is on an explicitly displayed (using default privacy settings)

network of friends, in which mutual friends which are not yet connected are suggested to one another. Content is organized in "feeds," visible at various times according to algorithms that consider relevance to known interests, proximity in time (and, likely, space, as Facebook collects locational data), and "closeness" of users to one another in the network, among other factors.

The Q13 Fox Facebook page is used to post videos, polls, and other content for those who have "liked" the page and other visitors to the page who might be attracted by the "liking" activity of their friends. A variety of content is posted to the page, most often including news reports. However, they also link to videos of the White House press briefings, which are covered live. Many of the comments posted to these briefings are formulated in real time as viewers react to the interactions between Sarah Huckabee Sanders and the press. Many users simply "like" the video itself, using a range of the available feedback modalities that Facebook has now provided (beyond the typical thumbs-up "like," there are thumbs-down, heart, laughing face, and angry face, and surprised face responses). This activity is not reflected in the above content analysis, nor are "likes" of different modalities than thumbs-up accounted for in the user feedback-drive visibility score variable.

In the three Facebook posts worth of comments that were studied, the predominate form of incivility was the casting of aspersions. These were generic insults, sometimes targeting Sarah Huckabee Sanders, other times targeting other commenters. Regularly, they were comments which criticized her appearance. Name-calling was also present, which often took the form of calling critics of the administration "snowflakes" and the ironic use of this term by critics to describe those who were defending Sarah. Many of the instances of incivility involved calling Sarah a liar or accusing her of lying, which then resulted in other users who seemingly supported Sarah and the administration in general defending her by insulting participants critical of the

administration. Interestingly enough, many comments which lacked incivility were of the sort

which praised her and lamented the fact that others were criticizing her. In terms of the broader

discourse context, this took the form of charges that others were "bullying" Sarah, and that

bullying was unacceptable. Critics of the administration noted Trump's hostile and aggressive

behavior on social media, thus accusing supporters of hypocrisy. They also pointed to how

hostile Sarah often was toward reporters, implying that this was a kind of bullying. Vulgarity

was present, but was not rampant. In general, commenters employed acronyms to express

vulgarity, as in the case of "WTF." On occasion, pejoratives relating to Sarah's speech were

used, but most often this category applied to commenters criticizing one another based on their

grammar and spelling. Facebook comments often exemplified very flippant participation,

including one- or two-word responses which did not express a clear opinion other than support or

distaste.

Reddit

Reddit is a content-aggregation website composed of segregated "sub-reddits," all of

which feed content into the "front page" of the website which greets visitors to the homepage

with a curated view of the most popular content on the site. Reddit is predominantly a website

aimed at English-speaking users, though there are sub-reddits where English is not the primary

language. Participation requires the creation of a username under which one can post, but nearly

all sub-reddits allow their content to be viewed by the general public (that is, non-users or users

who are not logged in). In this sense, there is an interesting dialectic between the publicity of

Reddit and the publicity of Facebook. Facebook is a much more widely used platform, and

content has the potential to reach hundreds of millions (in the widest distribution, billions). On

the other hand, in order to see any content whatsoever, users must be logged in, again with the

expectation that their account is authentically related to their offline identity. Reddit has a smaller user-base, and the nature of the sub-reddits is such that the an even smaller group of persons are likely to see any particular content. However, because viewers need not be logged in, the accessibility of the content makes it, in a sense, more public. Drawing from Warner (2002), the stranger relationality of publicity is differently instantiated in each case. The indefinite audience of Facebook is still bounded by membership to the site, which also coheres with the switching power that Castells (2011) focused upon. On the other hand, the indefinite audience of reddit is not bounded by membership, but rather interest and awareness of the platform in general. Facebook does not suffer from an awareness problem, consider its ubiquity in western society.

The comments studied for this thesis were drawn from the sub-reddit r/politics, a large subreddit devoted to US politics which limits original submissions (classified as "threads" on Reddit) to news items, such as articles and videos. For each White House press briefing, the same user posts an "official" thread for watching and discussing its content and implications. Thus, I found that much of the conversation that occurred in the Reddit thread involved the same 10-20 users, with a few one-off contributors. This differed significantly from Facebook, which was almost exclusively one-off contributors with few back-and-forth interactions that spanned two or three comments. As shown in Table 13, Reddit had proportionally more comments that were replies. This is probably a function of multiple aspects. A deeper reply structure (that is, Reddit allows replies to replies, and so on) is likely to be partially responsible for this, but I suspect that it also has to do with a smaller pool of participants who had co-constructed favorable perceptions of one another based on their interactions (Walther, 2011), rather than visible identifiability according to their offline identity. This would also help to explain the results of the

content analysis, which showed that Reddit comments were less likely to be incivil, and on average were less incivil and more thoughtful. Like Facebook, Reddit also has its own user driven-feedback visibility mechanism. However, Reddit's mechanism is more explicitly advertised in relation to visibility, as a major feature of Reddit as a platform is that upvotes push comments and threads "up" in a sub-reddit, making them more visible, while downvotes push comments "down" in a sub-reddit, making them less visible (in addition, comments which reach a downvote threshold are censured entirely). Facebook's "likes" play a role in organizing content, but many other factors are also relevant and it is not clear that users can rely on liking to determine visibility in a meaningful way.

In terms of transnationality of the public sphere, which Fraser (2007) discussed, r/politics is also more cosmopolitan, as even though this sub-reddit is focused on US politics and requires submissions and comments be in English, participants from other countries often contribute their views. This means that the entirety of the US is represented (though probably not with regional proportionality) and can expect persons of other nationalities to both see their content and contribute.

When describing the kinds of comments that were seen on Reddit, they did not differ significantly in the categories of incivility that were seen, except in regards to vulgarity. This is interesting, as it coheres with the explanation I had proposed for Facebook's relative lack of vulgarity. On Facebook, users might be reticent to use vulgarity, fearing that they will be criticized for exposing their friends to language which might offend them, resulting in consequences for their offline relationships. Reddit, on the other hand, offers a gap between offline and online persona, and as such users are less likely to censor themselves. Aspersions, name-calling, and accusations of lying were all present in similar proportions to Facebook.

Reddit users also criticized Sarah Huckabee Sanders for her looks, called her names, and accused

her of lying to the public. One major difference, however, between the samples was that

incivility on Reddit was almost always aimed at Sarah, with users rarely criticizing one another.

This suggests that r/politics is a place where a condition of homophily holds, similar to what

Conover, Gonclaves, and Flammini (2012) found on Twitter. However, at least one significant

disagreement revealed itself in the course of the investigation. This argument arose between the

user who regularly creates the "official" thread for the White House press briefings and a critic

who suggested that spreading misinformation and lies was counterproductive to their shared

imperatives. Many of the other users on r/politics supported the creator of the thread. The

disagreement proceeded with remarkable civility and thoughtfulness, as each considered the

others' point of view and exchanged their reason for holding their views. The critic worried that

paying attention to press briefings legitimized them, thus normalizing unacceptable behavior. On

the other hand, the creator of the thread argued that it was important to continue to watch and

hold the press secretary responsible for her lies, in addition to keeping track of what narrative

they were creating, disputing, or maintaining on each particular occasion. No such exchange was

found in the Facebook samples.

Summary

To recapitulate, the results of the content analysis suggest a number of conclusions. The

first is that reply structure matters for incivility and thoughtfulness. This may be due to the

interactional nature of replies, or it may be the result of other factors. The content analysis also

showed that the Reddit comments were less likely than the Facebook comments to be incivil, and

on average were less incivil and more thoughtful. Based on the collected data, it cannot be

concluded whether this is because of the difference in the depth of their reply structures, the

difference in the identifiability of participation, or some other constellation of affordances arising from the features of the platforms and the agency of their users. No connection was found between extent of incivility and thoughtfulness or extent of incivility and user feedback-drive visibility scores, nor was there a difference made by presence of incivility on thoughtfulness, meaning that thoughtfulness was not observed to suppress incivility and the extent of incivility does not drive users to penalize or praise in terms of feedback scores. A small relationship was observed between thoughtfulness and feedback scores, which may be because thoughtful participation simply has more relevant, interesting content to provide feedback for.

In conjunction, the quantitative and qualitative analyses show that Reddit and Facebook each offer various opportunities for democratic deliberation based on both the affordances of each platform and specific aspects of each studied sample. I suggest that discussion on Q13 Fox's Facebook page satisfy fewer of the preconditions that encourage democratic deliberation (civility and thoughtfulness), while discussions on r/politics lacked a significant degree of disagreement. Neither exemplified the ideals of deliberation explicated in Chapter 3, though each sample showed promise in virtue of affordances of the platform and the actual content of the discourse studied. In order to properly assess the claims that have been made, significantly more data needs to be collected, and a full discourse analysis that pays attention to both what users do with texts and the functioning of power in those texts is necessary for a better understanding. This leaves the door open for future research as further iterations of this project, transparently incorporating past findings and amending the assumptions according to new evidence.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

At the outset of this thesis, I laid out three propositions that this thesis sought to support: (1) that empirical research on the networked public sphere is important and worthwhile, even under complex communicative circumstances (2) that such research requires us to rethink methodological approaches, including the supposed incompatibility of quantitative and qualitative methods. The new approach needs to account for different forms of power/knowledge and new logics of (re)production, (re)distribution, and consumption of information; (3) and that there is a difference between the empirical existence and functioning of public(s) and a normative political ideal, and that studying both in relation to one another is necessary for combatting eroding faith in democratic values.

The argument for the first propositions can be summarized as follows: as communication environments have changed significantly with the proliferation of channels, there have been doubts that computer mediated communication could be anything less than a deficient and derivative form of communication in comparison to the face-to-face model. However, research programs such as Joseph Walther's (2011) have offered evidence that rich interpersonal communication can occur over digitally mediated channels, and conceiving of a Mass Personal Communication Model such as O'Sullivan and Carr's can help us to understand the complex overlay of interlinked channels that defy categorization as either interpersonal or mass communication. The argument for the second proposition is provided in Chapters 2 and 4, wherein the Habermasian concepting of the public sphere is outlined, in particular noting how Nancy Fraser, Michael Warner, Lincoln Dahlberg, and Manuel Castells make significant contributions to accounting for what power relations hold in a plurality of networked, transnational public spheres and how those power relations function. Finally, in Chapter 3 the

argument is made for the necessity of enumerating and endorsing norms to guide successful

democratic deliberation in the networked public sphere, while Chapter 5 address all three

propositions by attempting to identify whether preconditions hold in actual online environments

for the possible satisfaction of deliberative norms.

We find ourselves under circumstances that can only be described as stressed in terms of

the health of our democracy. As Bennett and Pfetsch (2018) argue that Habermas' idealized

conception of the public sphere is problematized by "the proliferation of social and digital media

has increased the dispersion and cacophony of public voices… [and] this fragmentation of

publics has led to an inability to communicate across differences" (p. 245). The strategic and

increasingly effective spread of falsehoods, the normalization of untrustworthy state institutions,

and a loss of faith in traditional forms of knowledge production and curation results in

circumstances where the prospects for democracy, much less the idealized deliberative form

argued for here, are not looking good. The burden of understanding the communicative

circumstances that have contributed to our predicament falls heavily upon academics, who stand

in a special relation to the prevailing methods for thinking about these issues. We have a

responsibility to the public to be watchful, self-critical, and innovative in addressing these issues,

all themes also found in Bennett and Pfetsch (2018). I have insisted that Habermas' ideal

conception of the public sphere, while complicated by the issues outlined thus far, remains useful

as a guiding light for those who know not where else to look. We can account for disparities in

the empirical accounts of actual public sphere(s) without abandoning the vision that Habermas

laid out for us, grounded in Kant's recognition that public scrutiny is key to harmonizing our

ends in circumstances of a plurality of conflicting interests (1989, p. 109). I continue to insist,

and promoting the value of deliberation while simultaneously seeking to understand how and

why such deliberation fails to occur remains paramount among my goals as I develop further

programs for research.

References

Allen, D. (2004). Talking to strangers anxieties of citizenship since Brown v. Board of

    Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bennett, W. L., & Pfetsch, B. (2018). Rethinking political communication in a time of disrupted

    public spheres. *Journal of Communication*, *68*(2), 243-253.

Bohman, J. (2004). Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for

    transnational democracy. The sociological review, 52(s1), 131-155.

Castells, M. (2000). *The rise of the network society*. Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

Castells, M. (2011). A Network theory of power. *International Journal of Communication, 5*, 15.

Chaffee, S. (1991). *Explication*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Coe, K., Kenski, K., & Rains, S. A. (2014). Online and uncivil? Patterns and determinants of

    incivility in newspaper website comments. *Journal of Communication*, *64*(4), 658–679.

Conover, M., Gonçalves, D., Flammini, B., & Menczer, A. (2012). Partisan asymmetries in

    online political activity. *EPJ Data Science*, 1(1), 1-19.

Dahlberg, L. (2001). The Internet and democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online

    deliberative forums extending the public sphere. *Information, Communication & Society,*

    4(4), 615-633.

Dahlberg, L. (2007). The Internet, deliberative democracy, and power: Radicalizing the public

    sphere. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics, 3*(1), 47-64

Dahlberg, L. (2011). Discourse theory as critical media politics? Five questions. In L. Dahlberg

    & S. Phelan (Eds), *Discourse theory and critical media politics* (pp. 41-64). Houndmills,

    Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dahlgren, P. (2005). The Internet, public spheres, and political communication: Dispersion and deliberation. *Political communication*, *22*(2), 147-162.

Ellison, N. B., & Vitak, J. (2015). Social network site affordances and their relationship to social capital processes. In S. S. Sundar (Ed.), *The handbook of the psychology of communication technology* (pp. 205-227). New York: Wiley & Sons.

Evans, S. K., Pearce, K. E., Vitak, J., & Treem, J. W. (2016). Explicating affordances: A conceptual framework for understanding affordances in communication research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *22*(1), 35-52.

Fairclough, N. (2018). CDA as dialectical reasoning. In J. Flowerdew & J.E. Richardson (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies*. (pp. 13-26). Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Feenberg, A. (1999). *Questioning technology*. London; New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M., & Rabinow, P. (2010). *The Foucault reader*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foa, R., & Mounk, Y. (2016). The democratic discontent. *Journal of Democracy, 27*(3), 5-17.

Freelon, D. (2015). Discourse architecture, ideology, and democratic norms in online political discussion. *New Media & Society, 17*(5), 772-791.

Freelon, D. (2015). On the cutting edge of big data: Digital politics research in social computing literature. In S. Coleman & D. Freelon (Eds.). *Handbook of digital politics*. (pp.451-472). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Fraser, N. (1990) "Rethinking the public sphere: Contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy." *Social Text, 25/26*, 56-80.

Fraser, N. (2007) "Transnationalizing the public sphere: On the legitimacy and efficacy of public opinion in a post-westphalian world." *Theory Culture and Society* 34(4), 7-30.

Galloway, A. (2004). *Protocol: How control exists after decentralization*. Cambridge, Mass.:

    MIT Press.

Gastil, J. (2008). Political communication and deliberation. Sage.

Gillespie, T. (2014) The Relevance of Algorithms. In Gillespie, T., Boczkowski, Pablo J., &

    Foot, Kirsten A. (Eds.), *Media technologies : Essays on communication, materiality, and*

    society (pp. 167-194).Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Gittleman, I.S. (2018, March 8). What if women were to say 'the army's sexist, I'm not

    enlisting'?. *Haaretz*. Retrieved from http://www.haaretz.com

Grewal, D. (2008). *Network power: The social dynamics of globalization*. New Haven: Yale

    University Press.

Habermas, J, Lennox, S, & Lennox, F. (1964). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article. New

    German Critique, (3), 49-55.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a*

    category of bourgeois society. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1992). Further reflections on the public sphere. In C. Calhoun (Ed.) *Habermas and*

    the public sphere. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 421-461.

Halpern, D., & Gibbs, J. (2013). Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the

    affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. Computers in Human

    Behavior, 29(3), 1159-1168.

Holub, R. (1991). *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the public sphere*. New York: Routledge.

Howard, P. (2005). Deep democracy, thin citizenship: The impact of digital media in political

    campaign strategy. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,

    597, 153-170.

Howard, P. (2011). *Castells and the media*. Cambridge ; Malden, MA: Polity.

Huckfeldt, R., Johnson, P. E., & Sprague, J. (2004). Political disagreement: The survival of

diverse opinions within communication networks. Cambridge University Press.

Jones, R., Chik, Alice, & Hafner, Christoph A. (2015). *Discourse and digital practices : Doing

discourse analysis in the digital age*. New York: Routledge.

Kelty, C. (2014) The Fog of Freedom. In Gillespie, T., Boczkowski, Pablo J., & Foot, Kirsten A.

(Eds.), *Media technologies : Essays on communication, materiality, and society* (pp. 195-

221).Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Kline, R., & Pinch, T. (1996). Users as agents of technological change: The social construction

of the automobile in the rural United States. Technology and culture, 37(4), 763-795.

Kreide, R. (2016). Digital spaces, public places and communicative power: In defense of

deliberative democracy. Philosophy & Social Criticism, 42(4-5), 476-486.

Krippendorff, K. (2013). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (3rd ed.). Los

Angeles; London: SAGE.

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic

politics*, 2nd edn. London: Verson.

Massanari, A. (2017). # Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance,

and culture support toxic technocultures. New Media & Society, 19(3), 329-346.

McCarthy, T. (1991). Introduction in J. Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public

sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Neuendorf, K. (2017). The content analysis guidebook (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Oberhaus, D. Algorithms supercharged gerrymandering. We should use them to fix it. (2017,

     October 3), *Vice.* Retrieved from

     https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/7xkmag/gerrymandering-algorithms

O'Sullivan, P. B., & Carr, C. T. (2017). Masspersonal communication: A model bridging the

     mass-interpersonal divide. *New Media & Society*.

Pasquale, F. (2015). The black box society: The secret algorithms that control money and

     information. Harvard University Press.

Pinch, T. J., & Bijker, W. E. (1984). The social construction of facts and artefacts: Or how the

     sociology of science and the sociology of technology might benefit each other. Social

     studies of science, 14(3), 399-441.

Pew Research Center, Washington D.C. (2017) *Social media fact sheet*. Retrieved from

     http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/

Rawls, J. (1996). Political liberalism. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rowe, I. (2015). Deliberation 2.0: Comparing the deliberative quality of online news user

     comments across platforms. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 59(4), 539-

     555.

Rowe, I. (2015). Civility 2.0: A comparative analysis of incivility in online political discussion.

     Information, Communication & Society, 18(2), 121-138.

Sukumaran, A., Vezich, S., Mchugh, M., & Nass, C. (2011). Normative influences on thoughtful

     online participation. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in

     Computing Systems,* 3401-3410.

Tam Cho, W. K., & Liu, Y. Y. (2016). Toward a Talismanic Redistricting Tool: A

    Computational Method for Identifying Extreme Redistricting Plans. Election Law

    Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy, 15(4), 351-366.

Treem, J. W., & Leonardi, P. M. (2013). Social Media Use in Organizations: Exploring the

    Affordances of Visibility, Editability, Persistence, and Association. *Annals of the*

    International Communication Association, *36*(1), 143–189.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2013.11679130

Walther, J. B. (2011). Theories of computer-mediated communication and interpersonal

    relations. The handbook of interpersonal communication, 4, 443-479.

Warner, M. (2002). *Publics and counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.

Waters, C. The algorithm that could help end partisan gerrymandering. (2017, April 10), *Vox*.

    Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/4/10/15211122/algorithm-

    end-partisan-gerrymandering

Weinstein, A. (2018, March 6). The NRA and its allies use jargon to bully gun-control

    supporters. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com