



The Impact of Social Media on Public Discourse: How Platforms Like TikTok and Twitter Shape Political and Cultural Discussions

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Abstract

This article examines the transformative impact of social media platforms on contemporary public discourse, with particular attention to Twitter and TikTok. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining media studies, political communication, and digital sociology, this research analyzes how these platforms' unique affordances, algorithmic systems, and user cultures distinctively influence political and cultural discussions. The study demonstrates how platform-specific features. Twitter's text-based immediacy and TikTok's audiovisual storytelling create different communicative environments that shape both content and participation patterns. Drawing on case studies from recent political events, cultural controversies, and social movements, this research identifies key mechanisms through which social media reconstructs public discourse: by fragmenting audiences into ideological communities, accelerating information cycles, democratizing participation while simultaneously amplifying certain voices, and blurring boundaries between entertainment and political communication. The findings suggest that while these platforms have expanded opportunities for diverse participation in public discourse, they have also created new challenges including misinformation proliferation, context collapse, and affective polarization. This research contributes to our understanding of how digital communication technologies fundamentally reshape democratic deliberation and cultural meaning-making processes, while highlighting the need for more nuanced platform-specific analysis in digital media research.

Keywords: - Social Media Platforms, Public Discourse, Twitter, Tiktok, Political Communication, Algorithmic Curation, Digital Sociology, Polarization, Networked Publics, Information Ecosystems

Introduction: Reimagining the Public Sphere in the Social Media Age

The concept of public discourse the open exchange of ideas, opinions, and information among citizens on matters of common concern has been central to democratic theory since Jürgen Habermas articulated his influential conception of the public sphere. However, the technological, social, and economic conditions that structure this discourse have undergone a profound transformation with the rise of social media platforms. No longer primarily mediated through traditional journalistic institutions, public conversations increasingly unfold across digital platforms that operate according to distinct technical architectures, business models, and cultural norms.

This research examines how contemporary social media platforms, particularly Twitter and TikTok, reshape the nature, quality, and dynamics of public discourse. These platforms represent contrasting approaches to digital communication Twitter emphasizing text-based, real-time exchanges and TikTok prioritizing short-form audiovisual creativity yet both have become significant sites for political and cultural discussions that influence broader societal conversations. By focusing on these platforms' distinctive characteristics and comparing their

impacts, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how different social media environments structure public communication.

The stakes of this inquiry are considerable. As social media platforms increasingly function as primary venues for political campaigning, news consumption, cultural debate, and social movement organization, their influence extends far beyond the digital realm to shape electoral outcomes, policy decisions, cultural production, and collective identity formation. Understanding how these platforms structure discourse is therefore essential not only for media scholars but for anyone concerned with the future of democratic deliberation, cultural meaning-making, and social cohesion.

This article proceeds by first establishing a theoretical framework for analyzing social media's impact on public discourse, drawing on media studies, political communication research, and digital sociology. It then examines the specific affordances and features of Twitter and TikTok, analyzing how their technical architectures shape communication patterns. Subsequently, through a series of case studies, it explores how these platforms influence political and cultural discussions, identifying key mechanisms through which they transform public discourse. Finally, it considers the broader implications of these changes for democratic societies and suggests directions for future research and potential interventions.

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Social Media's Communicative Landscape

From Mass Media to Networked Publics

The transition from mass media to networked digital communication represents a fundamental shift in how public discourse operates. Mass media systems of the twentieth century, characterized by centralized production and one-to-many distribution, created what Benedict Anderson termed "imagined communities" large groups of people who, though never meeting face-to-face, developed shared frames of reference through simultaneous consumption of the same media content. This system facilitated a relatively coherent, if limited, public discourse structured by professional journalistic norms and gatekeeping practices.

Social media platforms, by contrast, enable what danah boyd describes as "networked publics" spaces constructed through networked technologies and imagined communities that emerge through the intersection of people, technology, and practice. These networked publics operate according to different dynamics than mass media publics, characterized by properties including persistence (content remains accessible over time), scalability (potential for significant visibility), replicability (content can be duplicated), and searchability (content can be found through search).

Yochai Benkler's concept of a "networked public sphere" further illuminates how digital platforms reconfigure public discourse by lowering barriers to participation, enabling peer production of information, and creating more distributed patterns of authority and influence. This theoretical perspective highlights both the democratizing potential of social media its capacity to amplify previously marginalized voices and its tendency to fragment discourse into separate conversational clusters.

Algorithmic Curation and Attention Economies

A critical feature distinguishing contemporary social media from earlier online forums is the central role of algorithmic systems in organizing content and directing user attention. Tarleton Gillespie's work on "algorithmic governance" examines how these computational processes make decisions about what content to display, amplify, or suppress, functioning as powerful intermediaries that shape public discourse through largely opaque mechanisms.

These algorithmic systems operate within what Michael Goldhaber and subsequently others have termed "attention economies," where human attention becomes the scarce resource around which business models and technical systems are designed. Social media platforms compete for user engagement, often privileging content that generates strong emotional responses, controversy, or high interaction rates. This economic logic influences both platform design and content production strategies, incentivizing particular forms of communication that may prioritize engagement over deliberation or accuracy.

Zeynep Tufekci's analysis of "algorithmic publics" highlights how these systems create feedback loops that can amplify certain messages, entrench polarization, and fragment discourse into "filter bubbles" or "echo chambers." While empirical research suggests these effects are more complex and contingent than early formulations implied, the algorithmic mediation of social media undoubtedly structures public discourse in ways significantly different from previous media environments.

Affective Publics and Cultural Politics

The emotional dimension of social media communication has received increased scholarly attention, with Zizi Papacharissi's concept of "affective publics" illuminating how networked technologies enable publics that are "mobilized and connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment." These affective dimensions shape political and cultural discourse on social media, where communication frequently operates through personal narratives, identity claims, emotional appeals, and cultural references rather than formal argumentation or abstract principles.

Cultural studies approaches, drawing on the tradition of scholars like Stuart Hall, examine how social media becomes a site of "cultural politics" struggles over meaning, representation, and identity that constitute a crucial aspect of contemporary political discourse. These perspectives emphasize how seemingly personal or cultural content on platforms like TikTok often carries political significance, challenging traditional boundaries between entertainment, identity expression, and political communication.

Feminist media studies scholars like Sarah Banet-Weiser have analyzed how social media platforms become arenas for "popular feminism" and other identity-based movements, while simultaneously enabling reactionary countermovements. These approaches highlight the contested nature of social media discourse, where progressive and conservative forces engage in ongoing struggles over cultural representation and political meaning.

Platform Architectures: How Twitter and TikTok Structure Communication

Twitter's Conversational Dynamics

Twitter's distinctive features including its character limit (originally 140, now 280 characters), follower/following structure, retweet mechanism, hashtag system, and chronological-algorithmic hybrid timeline create specific conditions for public discourse. The platform's brevity constraint encourages concise expression but often at the expense of nuance, while its real-time nature accelerates communication cycles and rewards immediate responses rather than reflection.

The retweet function enables rapid amplification of messages beyond their original audience, creating potential for both viral spread of information and out-of-context circulation that can feed misunderstanding. Research by Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess demonstrates how Twitter's hashtag system facilitates "ad hoc publics" temporary communities that form around specific topics, events, or controversies enabling rapid mobilization but often lacking the stability necessary for sustained deliberation.

Twitter's relatively open network structure, where most content is public and can be viewed without registration, creates unusually permeable boundaries between different conversations and communities. This permeability enables cross-cutting exposure to diverse perspectives but also facilitates context collapse the flattening of multiple audiences into one which can exacerbate misunderstandings and conflicts.

The platform's verification system and follower metrics create a visible status hierarchy that influences discourse dynamics, with high-follower accounts functioning as attention switches that direct visibility toward particular topics or frames. This structure enables certain voices including journalists, politicians, celebrities, and other public figures to exercise disproportionate influence over public conversations, partially reproducing mass media logics within the supposedly more egalitarian networked environment.

TikTok's Audiovisual Vernacular

TikTok represents a significant evolution in social media communication, prioritizing short-form video (initially 15 seconds, now up to 10 minutes) and employing a highly personalized algorithmic feed (the "For You Page") that serves content based on engagement patterns rather than social connections. This architecture creates different conditions for public discourse than text-based platforms like Twitter, emphasizing audiovisual storytelling, performative communication, and algorithmic discovery rather than explicit network building.

The platform's creative tools including filters, effects, and easy-to-use editing features lower barriers to audiovisual production, enabling users to communicate through multimodal expression that combines visual, verbal, and musical elements. This rich communicative environment facilitates forms of political and cultural expression that operate through aesthetic and affective registers rather than explicit argumentation, with music, dance, and visual symbolism becoming important vehicles for political communication.

TikTok's "duet" and "stitch" features create distinctive conversational structures, allowing users to visually respond to others' content while maintaining the original context. This creates more coherent dialogic

exchanges than are typically possible on Twitter, where responses are often separated from original messages in users' experiences of the platform.

The platform's remarkably effective recommendation algorithm creates unusual pathways to visibility that differ from the follower-based metrics of other platforms. Research by Jing Zeng and Crystal Abidin demonstrates how TikTok's algorithmic distribution system can rapidly amplify previously unknown creators, potentially democratizing access to public attention while simultaneously creating highly personalized information environments that may limit exposure to diverse perspectives.

Social Media and Political Discourse: Reconfiguring Democratic Communication Election Campaigns and Political Messaging

Social media platforms have transformed electoral politics, creating new channels for candidate communication, supporter mobilization, and campaign messaging. The 2008 Obama campaign's innovative use of social media marked an early watershed, but more recent campaigns have adapted to evolving platform environments in increasingly sophisticated ways.

Twitter has become a central platform for political elites, with direct communication from politicians exemplified most dramatically by former President Trump's use of the platform by passing traditional media gatekeepers. Research by Daniel Kreiss demonstrates how campaigns strategically use Twitter to influence news coverage, shape narratives, and respond rapidly to developing events. The platform's emphasis on real-time communication has accelerated the pace of political messaging, creating pressure for immediate responses that can limit deliberative consideration.

TikTok emerged as a significant political communication platform during the 2020 election cycle, with distinctive patterns of political expression. Unlike Twitter's emphasis on elite communication, TikTok's political content often features ordinary users engaging with politics through personalized narratives, humor, and creative audiovisual techniques. The platform's predominantly young user base has made it an important venue for youth political expression, with research by Neta Kligler-Vilenchik documenting how young people use TikTok's creative affordances for "connective political expression" forms of political communication that blend personal expression with civic engagement.

Both platforms have been shaped by increasing political polarization, while potentially amplifying this polarization through algorithmic curation that may prioritize divisive content. The phenomenon of "affective polarization" where partisan identity becomes linked to strong positive feelings toward one's own party and negative feelings toward the opposition appears particularly pronounced in social media environments that reward emotional engagement and group identity signaling.

Social Movements and Activist Communication

Social media platforms have become crucial infrastructure for social movement organization and activist communication, enabling new forms of mobilization and narrative construction. Twitter's role in movements from the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter has been extensively documented, with the platform's hashtag system facilitating the rapid spread of movement frames and mobilizing information.

Zeynep Tufekci's concept of "tactical freezing" highlights a key challenge for social media-centered movements: they can quickly achieve remarkable visibility and participation but often struggle to develop the organizational capacity and strategic flexibility necessary for sustained impact. The ease of participation in "hashtag activism" can create impressive moments of attention but may not translate into the structural capacity needed for long-term political change.

TikTok has emerged as a significant platform for movement communication, particularly among younger activists. During the 2020 racial justice protests following George Floyd's murder, TikTok became an important venue for protest documentation, political education, and solidarity expressions. The platform's audiovisual format enabled powerful first-person testimony from protest participants, while creative remixing features allowed for rapid adaptation and circulation of movement messages.

Both platforms illustrate what Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg term "connective action" digitally networked forms of political participation that operate through personalized content sharing rather than formal organizational membership. This mode of participation enables rapid scaling but may produce different forms of commitment and sustainability than traditional movement structures.

Information Ecosystems and Democratic Knowledge

Social media platforms have fundamentally altered how political information circulates, challenging

traditional journalistic institutions while creating new vulnerabilities to misinformation. Twitter has become a central component of what Andrew Chadwick terms the "hybrid media system," where legacy and digital media logics interact in complex ways. Journalists heavily utilize the platform for source discovery, story promotion, and professional networking, creating a symbiotic relationship where tweets both respond to and shape mainstream news coverage.

This Twitter-journalism nexus creates accelerated news cycles where verification can be sacrificed for speed, while the platform's brevity constraints may reduce complex issues to simplified frames. Simultaneously, Twitter enables journalists to engage directly with audiences and critics, potentially increasing accountability but also exposing reporters to harassment that may constrain coverage of controversial topics.

TikTok represents a different challenge to traditional information hierarchies, with its algorithm potentially elevating ordinary users' political commentary to substantial audiences regardless of formal credentials or institutional affiliation. This democratization of political communication creates opportunities for previously marginalized perspectives but also raises concerns about verification and expertise in public discourse.

Both platforms have faced criticism regarding misinformation proliferation, though in different ways. Twitter's real-time nature and retweet function can enable rapid spread of false claims during breaking news events, while research by Yochai Benkler suggests its relatively open structure also facilitates fact-checking and correction. TikTok's audiovisual format creates particular challenges for content moderation and fact-checking, with misleading claims often embedded within complex multimodal messages that automated systems struggle to evaluate.

Cultural Discourse: Identity, Representation, and Meaning-Making

Identity Performance and Community Formation

Social media platforms function as significant venues for identity expression and community formation, with important implications for cultural discourse. Twitter enables identity articulation through profile customization, explicit self-description, and ongoing performance through posting patterns. Research by André Brock on "Black Twitter" demonstrates how the platform enables community formation around shared cultural references and communicative practices, creating spaces for intra-group communication that simultaneously remain visible to broader publics.

TikTok's audiovisual format facilitates more embodied forms of identity performance, with users expressing cultural, gender, sexual, religious, and other identities through visual presentation, music choices, and performative style. The platform has become particularly significant for LGBTQ+ youth identity exploration and community building, with research by Alexander Cho documenting how TikTok's algorithmic systems can connect users to identity-based communities that may be unavailable in their local environments.

Both platforms illustrate what Nancy Baym describes as "networked collectivism" forms of community that are neither fully individualistic nor traditionally collective, but rather operate through personally expressive actions that simultaneously signal group belonging. This dynamic shape cultural discourse by creating visible communities organized around shared identities, values, or interests that can articulate collective perspectives in public conversations.

Cultural Criticism and Canon Formation

Social media has transformed processes of cultural evaluation and canon formation, democratizing cultural criticism while potentially reinforcing certain forms of cultural authority. Twitter has become a significant venue for cultural commentary, with users responding to media releases, cultural events, and controversies in real time. The platform enables both professional critics and ordinary users to participate in evaluative conversations, potentially diversifying the perspectives that shape cultural reception.

Research by Angèle Christin demonstrates how Twitter metrics increasingly influence cultural journalists' understanding of audience preferences, creating feedback loops between social media engagement and cultural coverage. This dynamic can amplify certain cultural perspectives while marginalizing others, particularly given documented disparities in platform verification and amplification across demographic groups.

TikTok's recommendation algorithm creates distinctive patterns of cultural discovery and evaluation, potentially surfacing content that might be overlooked in traditional cultural gatekeeping systems. The platform has repeatedly demonstrated capacity to drive musical success, with viral TikTok trends translating into streaming numbers and chart positions. This influence extends to literature through the "BookTok" phenomenon, where user recommendations have significantly impacted book sales and publishing strategies.

Both platforms illustrate what Jean Burgess and Joshua Green identified in earlier research on YouTube: the complex interplay between "participatory culture" and commercial media systems in digital environments, where user-driven evaluation processes operate alongside institutional cultural authorities in constructing cultural significance.

Visual Politics and Memetic Communication

Social media has elevated the importance of visual and memetic communication in public discourse, with political and cultural discussions increasingly operating through images, videos, and remixed content that combines humor, cultural references, and political commentary. Twitter, despite its text-centric origins, now features substantial visual communication, with memes and images often conveying complex political positions through cultural shorthand.

TikTok represents the further evolution of this visual politics, with its audiovisual format enabling forms of political and cultural expression that operate primarily through aesthetic rather than verbal means. Research by Josephine Lukito and Chris Wells documents how TikTok users engage with political issues through techniques including "point-of-view" videos that emotionally simulate political experiences, music-driven montages that construct political narratives, and creative use of platform features to circumvent content moderation.

Both platforms demonstrate what Limor Shifman terms "meme logic" communicative patterns centered on imitation, remixing, and iterative adaptation of content. This logic shapes public discourse by privileging messages that can be easily adapted, personalized, and recirculated, potentially favoring affective and identity-based communication over traditional deliberative forms.

Institutional Responses and Platform Governance

Content Moderation and Speech Regulation

The governance of speech on social media platforms has become a central concern for democratic societies, with platforms developing increasingly complex content moderation systems that shape public discourse through rules, algorithmic enforcement, and human review. Twitter's approach has evolved significantly over time, from its early self-description as "the free speech wing of the free speech party" to more interventionist policies addressing harassment, misinformation, and harmful content.

Research by Tarleton Gillespie demonstrates how content moderation functions not merely as rule enforcement but as a fundamental aspect of what platforms are systems that actively curate public expression rather than neutral conduits. This perspective highlights how moderation decisions inevitably involve contested value judgments about appropriate speech that carry significant implications for public discourse.

TikTok's content moderation practices have raised distinctive concerns, particularly regarding alleged censorship of political content and the platform's relationship to Chinese parent company ByteDance. Research by Jing Zeng, Crystal Abidin, and others has documented instances of apparent suppression of content related to politically sensitive topics, raising questions about transnational governance of communication platforms.

Both platforms illustrate the complex challenges of speech governance in digital environments that span jurisdictional boundaries and cultural contexts. Regulatory approaches vary significantly across regions, with the European Union's Digital Services Act representing a more interventionist approach than current U.S. policy. These divergent regulatory frameworks create challenges for platforms operating globally while highlighting the lack of democratic consensus on how to balance free expression with concerns about harmful content.

Journalism and Media Adaptation

Legacy media institutions have developed various strategies for adapting to the social media environment, with news organizations investing heavily in platform-specific content and distribution strategies. Twitter has become deeply integrated into journalistic practice, functioning simultaneously as a reporting tool, distribution channel, and branding platform for individual journalists and news organizations.

Research by Nikki Usher documents how Twitter's influence on journalism extends beyond distribution to shape news values and professional identity, with platform metrics creating new forms of status within the profession. This close relationship raises concerns about platform dependence, with algorithmic or policy changes potentially having significant impacts on news organizations' reach and business models.

TikTok presents different challenges and opportunities for journalism, with its audiovisual format requiring adaptation of traditional reporting formats. News organizations have experimented with TikTok-native approaches including personality-driven reporting, behind-the-scenes content, and explanatory videos adapted to the platform's brief format and predominantly young audience.

These adaptations illustrate the broader phenomenon of media convergence identified by Henry Jenkins, where previously distinct media forms and institutions increasingly interact and transform each other through digital intermediation. This process shapes public discourse by blurring boundaries between journalism, entertainment, and user-generated content while potentially creating new hybrid forms of public knowledge production.

Case Studies: Platform-Specific Discourse Patterns

Twitter and the COVID-19 Information Environment

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a natural experiment in how social media shapes public discourse during crisis, with Twitter playing a central role in information circulation about the virus. Research by Sarah Shugars and Nicholas Beauchamp analyzing millions of COVID-related tweets demonstrates how the platform enabled rapid dissemination of scientific findings and public health guidance, potentially accelerating knowledge transfer relative to traditional scientific communication channels.

Simultaneously, Twitter amplified certain forms of misinformation and conspiracy theories about the virus, with the platform's emotional dynamics and group identity processes influencing reception of health information. Analysis by Renée DiResta and Isabella García-Camargo illustrates how political polarization on the platform became mapped onto pandemic discourse, with partisan identity increasingly predicting attitudes toward health measures.

The case highlights Twitter's complex role in crisis communication simultaneously enabling unprecedented access to expert knowledge and rapid updating of information while also facilitating fragmentation into distinct information communities with divergent understandings of basic facts. These dynamics suggest both the potential and limitations of social media for public deliberation on complex scientific and policy questions.

TikTok and the Transformation of Political Youth Culture

TikTok's emergence as a political communication platform was dramatically illustrated during the 2020 presidential campaign, when users of the platform claimed to have inflated registration expectations for a Trump rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, by coordinating mass false RSVPs. This episode highlighted how the platform's predominantly young user base was developing distinctive forms of political expression and organization that operated beneath the radar of many political observers.

Research by Alessandro Bessi and Emilio Ferrara analyzing TikTok content during the 2020 election period demonstrates how the platform's audiovisual format enabled forms of political expression that differed significantly from text-based platforms, with young users often engaging politics through humor, personal narrative, and creative remixing of campaign materials.

The case illustrates how new platforms can enable distinctive political cultures to develop among demographic groups previously marginalized in public discourse, while also highlighting the challenges of studying and understanding political communication across increasingly differentiated platform environments.

Conclusion: Implications for Democratic Societies and Future Research

This examination of how Twitter and TikTok shape political and cultural discourse reveals several key insights with significant implications for democratic societies. First, platform-specific features matter substantially for how public discourse unfolds. Different technical architectures, algorithmic systems, and user cultures create distinct communicative environments that privilege certain forms of expression, participation patterns, and content types. Future research and policy approaches must become more attentive to these platform-specific dynamics rather than treating "social media" as a monolithic category.

Second, social media platforms have simultaneously democratized and fragmented public discourse. They have expanded participation by lowering barriers to public expression and creating new pathways to visibility for previously marginalized voices. Simultaneously, they have created conditions for increased polarization, misinformation proliferation, and context collapse that challenges productive deliberation. This tension between democratization and fragmentation represents a central challenge for contemporary democratic societies.

Third, the boundaries between political and cultural discourse have become increasingly porous in social media environments. Cultural expression frequently carries political significance, while political communication increasingly operates through cultural references, identity signals, and affective appeals rather than explicit policy arguments. This blurring challenges traditional distinctions between political and cultural analysis while highlighting the need for interdisciplinary approaches that can address both dimensions simultaneously.

Fourth, algorithmic governance represents a significant new force in public discourse that operates according to commercial rather than democratic logics. The design decisions, ranking systems, and moderation approaches of platforms shape public conversation in profound ways that lack transparency and democratic accountability. Developing more effective governance systems for these algorithmic intermediaries represents a critical challenge for maintaining healthy public discourse.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has several limitations that suggest directions for future inquiry. First, the rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms means that specific features and user practices may change significantly even as broader patterns persist. Longitudinal research tracking how discourse patterns evolve across platform changes would provide valuable perspective on which aspects of social media's impact are tied to specific features versus deeper structural characteristics.

Second, this analysis has focused primarily on English-language discourse in North American and European contexts. Research examining how these platforms function across different linguistic, cultural, and political contexts would provide important comparative perspective on their global impact. Particularly valuable would be studies examining how platforms designed in specific cultural contexts (like Chinese-owned TikTok) operate when deployed globally.

Third, methodological challenges in studying algorithmic systems limit our understanding of how recommendation and amplification mechanisms shape discourse. Developing more robust techniques for algorithmic auditing and transparent research access to platform data represents an important direction for future work.

Finally, interdisciplinary approaches combining political communication research with cultural studies, critical algorithm studies, and platform economics would enable more comprehensive understanding of how social media reshapes public discourse across its multiple dimensions.

Practical Implications

This research suggests several practical implications for various stakeholders concerned with the health of public discourse. For platform companies, it highlights the need for more thoughtful design choices that consider impacts on collective communication, not merely individual engagement. Features that enhance context preservation, reduce harassment, and facilitate cross-cutting exposure while maintaining community integrity could significantly improve discourse quality.

For policymakers, this research suggests the need for regulatory approaches that address platform-specific dynamics rather than broad content categories. Policies enhancing algorithmic transparency, promoting competition to prevent platform entrenchment, and establishing democratic oversight mechanisms for key content governance decisions could help align platform operation with democratic values.

For educators and media literacy advocates, understanding platform-specific communication patterns is essential for developing effective educational interventions. Teaching platform-specific critical evaluation skills, understanding of algorithmic curation, and awareness of how technical features shape communication could help prepare citizens for more effective participation in digital discourse environments.

For journalists and media organizations, this research highlights both the opportunities and risks of platform integration. Developing sustainable approaches that leverage social media's reach while maintaining journalistic independence and values represents a crucial challenge for supporting informed public discourse.

As social media platforms continue to evolve and new platforms emerge, understanding their distinct impacts on public discourse will remain essential for anyone concerned with the health of democratic communication and cultural meaning-making processes. By attending to the specific mechanisms through which these technologies shape how we talk to each other about matters of common concern, we can work toward digital communication environments that better serve democratic values while embracing the creative and connective possibilities these technologies enable.

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