

Karoline Helbig

# DEMOCRACY AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

The Effects of Social Media Platforms  
on Deliberative Systems

Karoline Helbig  
Democracy and Digital Communication

**Karoline Helbig** is a researcher working at the intersection of digital technology, democratic theory and sociology. She earned her doctorate in 2024 from Leibniz Universität Hannover, where her research examined the influence of digital architectures on political communication and democracy. With an academic background in sociology, democratic theory and mathematics, she has contributed to several interdisciplinary research initiatives on the effects of digitisation on democratic processes, including work at Harvard Kennedy School's Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights as a Technology and Human Rights Fellow and within research groups at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) and the Weizenbaum Institute.

Karoline Helbig

# **Democracy and Digital Communication**

The Effects of Social Media Platforms on Deliberative Systems

**[transcript]**

Concurrently: doctoral thesis under the title “Deliberative Democracy and Digital Communication. The Effects of Social Media Platforms on Deliberative Systems”, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Universität Hannover, 2024.

This publication received financial support from the Open Access Fund of the Leibniz Universität Hannover, the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB) and Power for Democracies gGmbH.

### **Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available online at <https://dnb.dnb.de>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License BY 4.0. For the full license terms, please visit the URL <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder. The obligation to research and clear permission lies solely with the party re-using the material.

**2026 © Karoline Helbig**

transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | [live@transcript-verlag.de](mailto:live@transcript-verlag.de)

The automated analysis of the work in order to obtain information, particularly concerning patterns, trends, and correlations as defined in § 44b (text and data mining) of the German Copyright Act (UrhG) is prohibited without the written consent of the rights holders.

Cover concept: Maria Arndt

Printing: Elanders Waiblingen GmbH, Waiblingen

Proofreading: Daniel Barber

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839459980>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-8056-0 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-5998-0

ISSN of series: 2702-9050 | eISSN of series: 2702-9069

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

# Contents

---

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	7
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	9
<b>2. The Deliberative Systems Approach</b> .....	21
2.1 Deliberation .....	28
2.1.1 Systems Approach Perspectives on Deliberation .....	29
2.1.2 Refined Conceptions of Deliberation, Deliberative Standards and Deliberative Qualities .....	38
2.2 Deliberative Sites .....	47
2.2.1 Defining Deliberative Sites .....	48
2.2.2 Deliberative Qualities in Deliberative Sites .....	52
2.3 Connections between Deliberative Sites .....	57
2.3.1 Defining Deliberative Connections .....	58
2.3.2 Connections and Deliberative Qualities .....	66
2.4 Deliberative Systems .....	74
2.4.1 The Definition and Traits of Deliberative Systems .....	74
2.4.2 Systemic Deliberative Qualities .....	83
<b>3. The Digital Constellation as a Context for Deliberative Systems</b> .....	91
3.1 The Digital Constellation .....	95
3.2 The Restructured Public Sphere .....	100
<b>4. Social Media Platforms as Parts of Deliberative Systems</b> .....	121
4.1 The Logics of Social Media Platforms .....	122
4.1.1 Collecting, Standardising and Storing Data .....	123
4.1.2 Content Moderation and Recommender Systems .....	127
4.2 The Relevance of Social Media Platforms for Deliberative Systems .....	143

4.2.1	An Oligopoly of Platforms .....	144
4.2.2	Social Media Platforms' Interwovenness with Deliberative Systems .....	149
<b>5.</b>	<b>Platform Architectures and Their Implications for Deliberative Systems</b> .....	<b>157</b>
5.1	Specific Forms of Expression on Social Media Platforms and Their Value for Deliberation .....	162
5.1.1	One-Click Reactions and the Quantification of Communication .....	164
5.1.2	Images and Sounds .....	172
5.2	Fundamental Structures of Communication Processes on Social Media Platforms ..	177
5.2.1	Identifying Sites and Connections on Social Media Platforms .....	178
5.2.2	Platform Architectures' Significance for Deliberative Systems .....	188
<b>6.</b>	<b>Reifications of Social Structures on Platforms and Their Effects on Deliberative Systems</b> .....	<b>201</b>
6.1	Reifications of Time .....	203
6.1.1	High-Speed Communication and Long-Term Accessibility .....	204
6.1.2	Timescapes .....	209
6.2	Reifications of Communicational Conventions .....	213
6.2.1	Languages .....	215
6.2.2	Communicational Conventions of Platform Communities .....	221
6.3	Reifications of Identity .....	242
6.3.1	Author Identity, Anonymity and Pseudonymity .....	243
6.3.2	Group and Role Identifications .....	253
<b>7.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>269</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>References</b> .....	<b>281</b>