

MEASURING OPINIONATED COMMUNICATION

PUBLIC OPINION NEGOTIATIONS IN A DIGITAL MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

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Point of departure:

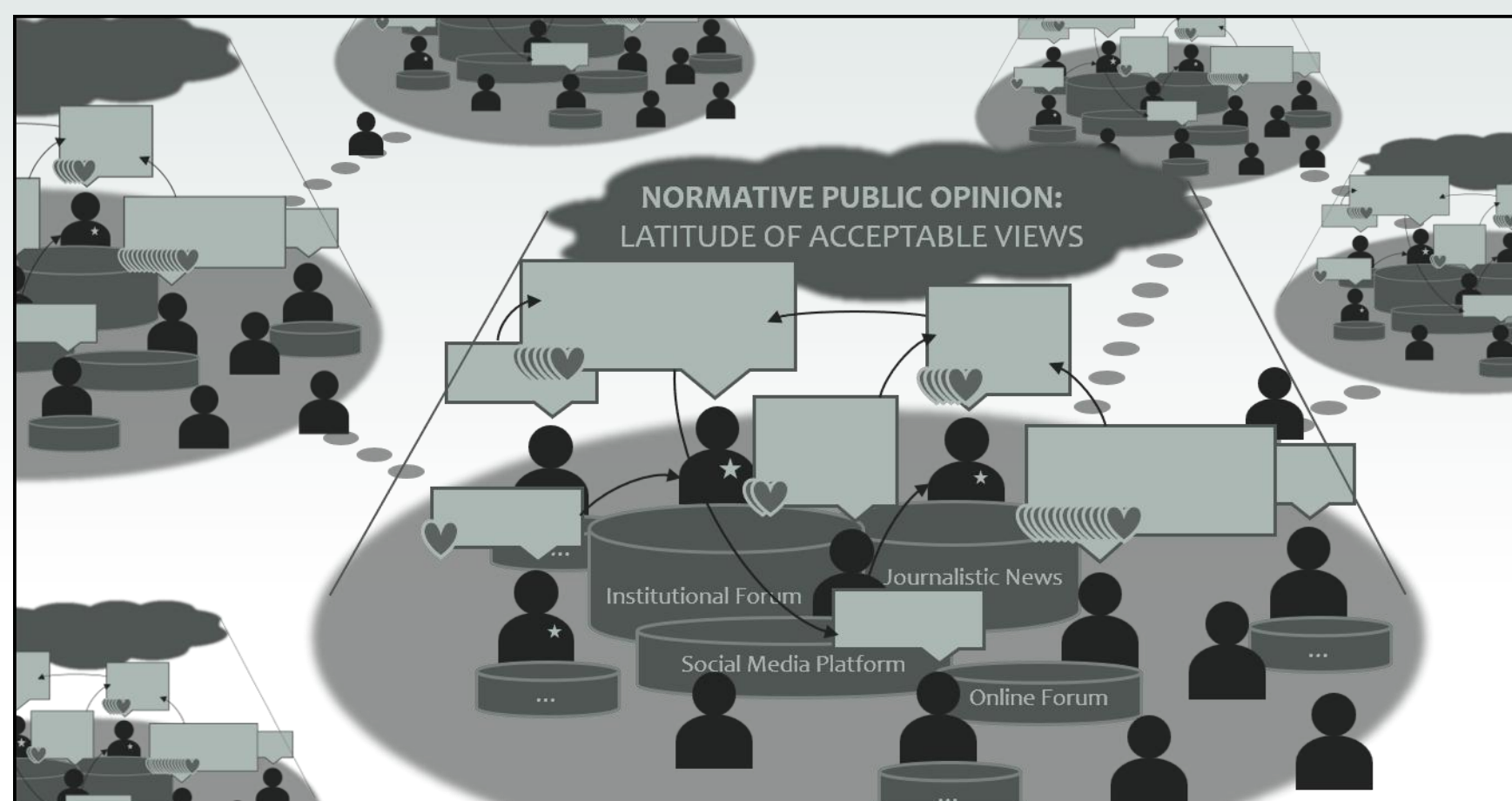
We cannot learn much about what people think by counting opinion expressions on digital media. And yet, public opinion clearly happens on digital media.

Our contribution:

We draw upon literature on public opinion negotiations from before the rise of the survey-based paradigm to advance how public opinion negotiations on digital media can be conceptualized.

Our model:

We identify 5 defining, enduring characteristics of public opinion negotiations as a discursive process. Subsequently, we discuss how these characteristics play out in the distinctive context of digital media. Based on these discussions, we propose avenues for studying the digital expression and negotiation of public opinion.



Participatory Expression

To express one's opinion in public is to address the public, claim relevance and legitimacy, and engage in participation. Despite lowered barriers on digital media, most people still never express most opinions in public.

Public discourse informs us what people are motivated to express views about and feel legitimate and safe to demand in public.

Research needs to factor in the systematic over-expression of invested views and the scarcity of moderate, weaker, and contested ones.

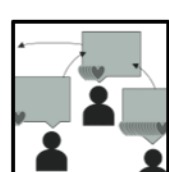


Normative Acceptability

Participatory expression claims legitimacy, mobilizing and affirming social norms in the process. Within digital media environments, these norms are continuously renegotiated.

Public discourse reveals the normative structuring of public opinion negotiations and foregrounds latitudes and limits of acceptability and legitimate contestation.

Research needs to focus on how opinions are justified and contested, and which justifications are recognized as valid.

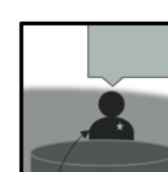


Interactive Negotiation

Acceptability is negotiated interactively in public through both direct and indirect exchanges. On digital media, this debate is highly complex, involves numerous actors and evolves quickly.

Public discourse enables us to observe how latitudes of acceptable views emerge, are challenged and evolve as part of an ongoing, interactive social process.

Research needs to shift focus from regarding all that is expressed, toward identifying what opinions are left standing.



Positioned Contributions

In negotiations, participants perform different roles, mobilizing relational and symbolic capital to gain authority. Digital media have facilitated the ad-hoc negotiation of actors' standing.

Public discourse enables us to observe how societal power and status interact with popularity and resonance to shape public opinion.

Research needs to consider speakers' authority, acceptability and capacity to colour expressions through their known roles.



Context-Embedded Arenas

Negotiations take place within unbounded, networked publics that recognize multiple, differentiated sites of discourse. Digital sites are governed by institutional and technical constraints.

Public discourse is tied to differentiated public spheres constituted by/constituting distinct imagined communities that may sustain different public opinion climates.

Research needs to study opinion expressions relative to where they occur, and how they are shaped by their discursive context.