

“Will Democracy Survive Social Media?”
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Key Points:

1. Democracy is a way of life, not just a system of government.
2. Communication is the lifeblood of democracy, and democracies will thrive or die based on the quality of the communication systems and practices with which we live.
3. Communication is not the transmission of information or the sharing of minds; it is a process of producing effects and creating meaning.
4. Media are not conduits of information; they are the infrastructure of our being. Media produce effects on us, make specific communication practices possible, and create the affordances for our lives.
5. Communication systems make up the critical infrastructure of democratic life, and Communication practices are the habits we all use to interact with our fellow citizens.
6. Democratic communication systems promote sociality over isolation, weak ties over strong ties, bridging capital over bonding capital, prioritize relationships over positions and modesty/revisability over hyperbole and fixity.
7. Democratic communication practices include relational rhetorics of care for strangers, careful forms of argumentation and reasoning, cooperation and collaboration, invention and innovation, compromise, and identification.
8. Anti-democratic communication systems, like social media, circulate information quickly and at great scale, promote strong ties with like-minded people, lead to isolation and loneliness, glorify position-taking and entertainment, and lead to extremism and exaggeration.
9. Anti-democratic communication practices include frequent use of hyperbole for attention, engagement by clicks, likes and shares, repetition, alienation, and divisive rhetoric.
10. If we want to save democracy, we need better communication systems and better communication practices.

Further Reading:

- *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* by Louis Menand (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).
- *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation* by James Fishkin (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- *Democracy and Tradition* by Jeffrey Stout (Princeton University Press, 2004).
- *Blessed are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* by Jeffrey Stout (Princeton University Press, 2012).
- *Philosophy and Social Hope* by Richard Rorty (Penguin Books, 2000).
- *The Public and Its Problems* by John Dewey (Swallow Press, 2016).
- *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations* by Amy Chua (Penguin Publishing, 2018).
- *Why We're Polarized* by Ezra Klein (Simon & Schuster, 2021).
- *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition* by John Peters (University of Chicago Press, 2020).
- *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* by John Durham Peters (University of Chicago Press, 2016).
- *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* by Robert Putnam (Simon & Schuster, 2020).
- *In Search of Braver Angels: Getting Along Together in Troubled Times* (Braver Angels, 2022).
- *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens* by Josiah Ober (Princeton University Press, 2010).
- *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* by Marshall McLuhan (MIT Press, 1994).
- *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* by Neil Postman (Penguin Books, 2005).

And don't forget, by Robert Danisch:

- *Beyond Civility: The Competing Obligations of Citizenship* with William Keith (Penn State University Press, 2018).
- *Radically Civil: How to Save Democracy one Conversation at a Time* with William Keith (Routledge Press, 2024).
- *What Effect Have I Had? 100 Communication Practices to Help You be a Better Partner, Teammate, Writer, Speaker, and Leader* (KDP, 2018).
- Forthcoming in the Fall: *Living Democracy: How Communication Systems and Practices Shape Political Culture* (Lexington Books, 2024).