

The Parameters of Media Engagement

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Abstract

Democracy depends on engaged citizens. And yet, the most powerful discourses surrounding engagement are strategically designed to drive commercial markets. Digital platforms such as TikTok, or YouTube, track content choices, algorithmically predict engagement patterns and aggregate this into a data archive within a closed system of subscriber information. In such a way engagement metrics are weaponized by contemporary capitalist media. As a counterpoint to this horizon, the main purpose of this talk is to understand theories of media engagement not as a metric, but as a marker of power relations.

In the context of the current divisive social climate, citizens are struggling to know what is going on, how to think or feel, or show who they are in society. Without engaging in meaningful and constructive ways with information, citizens are excluded. As researchers, we can try to tune in to those who struggle to find a voice. As citizens, we must all ensure that we have a sustained voice, in whatever sets of power relations we find ourselves in.