Chapter 1

Introduction

**Origin of this Book**

This book builds on the work which we did for our former book we edited and published in the year 2000. It was called *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice* (Sage Publications). This book addressed certain theoretical and practical issues about the use of digital media in political communication. Our 2000 book was well-received and praised for its shelf life. We believe that the success of that book was caused by its provision of in-depth political and communication theory in a field that is so sensitive to technological and political change. However, theoretical development and empirical research have continued since that time and many new uses of digital media in politics have been explored in the last fifteen years.

What has occurred since the change of the millennium? First of all, the diffusion of the Internet and the digital media has accelerated to reach the majority of the populations of the developing countries between 70 and 95 percent penetration. In this period new digital media appeared such as the social media. Just like the new media before they have assumed to have a number of opportunities for democracy. Simultaneously, a whole new ecology of cross-media relations of traditional and digital media emerged that is able to substantially change political communication (Chadwick, 2013, Jenkins et al., 2013). This diffusion and these new media might have a much bigger potential impact on democracy than before the millennium.

Secondly, in this period the practice of using digital media in politics and democracy has matured. This practice can be for or against democracy. The expression ‘against’ is used because digital media can also make the conditions of democracy worse. For instance, when they help to create ‘filter bubbles’ and micro-targeting political marketing for citizens only following their own views, to distribute ‘fake news’, to wipe away editing and moderation, to harm privacy, to allow censorship, to undermine the democratic national state in globalization and other potential effects to be discussed in this book. Less insidiously, the expansion of digital communication has empowered those who have more offline political power than those who have less. Despite noble efforts, researchers have not found any significant exception to this pattern. It is true that anyone can create a blog or social media post, but gaining an audience for them is another matter. The importance of the Internet for politics has increased and the era of television democracy is gradually passing to the era of Internet democracy or cross-media democracy combining broadcasting and interactive media. So, simply replacing older media, the digital media create an ecology of media and offer all kinds of innovations in political communication.

**The 2000 claims of digital democracy and their results 15 years on**

Around 2000 fairly strong claims were made by advocates of digital divide summarized by Tsagarousianou (1999):

1. Digital democracy improves political information retrieval and exchange between governments, public administrations, representatives, political and community organizations and individual citizens.
2. Digital democracy supports public debate, deliberation and community formation.
3. Digital democracy enhances participation in political decision-making by citizens.

In 2000 we concluded that more and better information access and were among its most important accomplishments at that time. However, we found that its value for democracy was quite another affair. Accessible, reliable and valid information is a necessary condition of democracy, but is it sufficient? We thought not. There are numerous steps between retrieving information and having any impact on decision making. First, is the information reliable and valid or is it disinformation? Second, is information not abundant and perceived as an information overload by many people? The following crucial question is what one actually does with information. Is it transformed into political action? We cited authors arguing that decisions are not necessarily improved by the simple expedient of acquiring information. Decisions are ultimately matters of judgement. The art of judgement may be hampered by an abundance of information (Hacker & van Dijk, p. 215). Since the year 2000 political information sources have multiplied. However, have the benefits in terms of political knowledge and action also grown?

A second claim of digital democracy was support of public debate, deliberation and community formation. In 2000, we concluded that the first attempts to launch debates, deliberation and communities lacked an adequate level and quality of interactivity. We observed few interactivity between contributors. Most people only read to the contributions of others and not contribute themselves. When they did, the favourite people addressed were political representatives that did not respond or only returned automatic messages. Frequently, the debate was dominated by a few persons. Finally, were observed a lack of pressure to come to consensus or even to find conclusions as compared to face-to-face discussion groups (idem, p. 216). After 2000, the number of blogs, online communities and debates have increased dramatically. In one decade, an important new venue massively used for debate has been born: the social media. They are used by the average of the population and not the elite that dominated the online political debates in the 1990s. Have these new media of public opinion making facilitated public debate more and better than before?

The third claim was the enhancement of participation in political decision making by citizens using the digital media. We found that there was no perceivable effect of the use of digital media on decision making by institutional politics at that time. This was in spite of the fact that a considerable amount of horizontal communication about what to do or what to vote was started at that time. It did not have any effect on political decision making at that time. Apparently, any potential effect seemed to be blocked by the system of representative democracy (*idem*: 216-7). It is striking that terms such as tele-democracy, tele-polls and tele-referenda that started the discussions about digital democracy in the 1980s (Becker, 1981, Arterton, 1987) have become extinct or exchanged by more vague terms not referring to direct democracy.

Is the claim of direct democracy by means of digital media to be discarded? In the last fifteen years, more powerful technologies for online voting and opinion making have arrived as compared to so-called cable television box remote voting (Arerton, 1987). We now have electronic voting in some countries and perhaps even proposals to use the social media or better secured messaging services for reliable voting. Why are these services not offered for this purpose?

One of these reasons is that direct and representative democracy are part of separate levels of communication that perhaps do not reach each other. In our 2000 book we presented a model of political interactivity between and inside levels of the political system(*id*.:217). See Figure 1 below. At the macro-level we observed the exchange of government departments (arrow 1), at the meso-level party, community and pressure group communication (arrow 2) and at the micro-level communication between individual citizens (arrow 3), all levels using digital media horizontally. Next, we observed two-way vertical communication between governments and political organisations such as parties and economic organisations like businesses (arrow 5). We also saw frequent two-way vertical communication between political organisations and citizens (e-campaigning) and businesses and consumers (e-commerce) depicted in arrow 6. However, crucially direct vertical two-way communication between citizens and government was buffered (arrow 4) because governments rarely responded to individual messages of citizens. They used the mass media and their own websites to reach citizens collectively and they individually surveyed citizen



**Figure 1.1: Levels and Links of Communication in the Political System**(Source: Hacker & van Dijk, 2000: p. 217)

and voter behaviour to create Big Data. The other way round some citizens tried to directly address governments but in fact had to use their representatives (the meso-level) to reach them. In this way direct democracy does not come to pass at all. Now, fifteen years later we wonder whether new venues such as using social media, e-government services and the explorations of e-voting or e-referenda are able to bring more real opportunities and practices for two-way vertical communication between governments and citizens and perhaps even change the political system.

So, in the 1990s many utopian and dystopian claims about the opportunities of digital democracy were offered. Now, fifteen years later those claims can be evaluated in growing practices of the use of digital media by governments, politicians, political parties and communities, societal organizations and civilians. These practices enable to make a more detailed balance-sheet of the performance of digital democracy than we made in *Digital Democracy* (2000).

It is possible to argue that most salient contributions of digital media to politics are involvement in political activities whether democratic or anti-democratic. The last word and occurrence could be uncomfortable for some observers because they have been conditioned to equate expanded channels of communication with increased democracy. In the 21st century, scholars should avoid “Arab Spring Twitter revolution” and deterministic statements about digital communication transforming societies or giving birth to democracies. Currently, a more cautious and data-based approach to the connections between Internet usage political participation is needed. Actual findings tend to be more modest and less radical than the breathless praise of online technologies for democratization suggests. Data showed, for example, early in the 21st century, that television and the Internet were both prominent sources for political information and that the Internet never did replace TV as was anticipated. Similarly, TV did not replace radio.

Major changes in the world have occurred with movements toward both democratization and globalization. Globalization and the expansion of network societies are obviously related, but the politics of both remain unclear. China’s blend of authoritarianism with expanded networking and capitalism offers new opportunities of communication and democracy. Slowly but surely, a public sphere arrives in China that is not completely controlled any more by totalitarianism. Messaging systems such as Weibo offer this opportunity. However, while connectivity and democracy are statistically correlated, the direction of causality is unexplained. Web applications are not a magic wand to conjure democratic systems. Though there is much excitement about closed societies like China expanding Internet usage, we have to remind ourselves that just half of the Chinese population is an Internet user. In the meantime, the Chinese government continues to increase its proficiency at filtering and manipulating regular Internet use.

**The mission of this book**

In this book, we link the views and theories of democracy to concepts of communication in networks and the network society at large. This is a conceptual and theoretical mission. After the 2000 *Digital Democracy* book, we do not see sufficient theoretical advance in this domain. After at least a decade of speculation and empirical analysis, it is abundantly clear that the concept of digital democracy needs more expansive definition and theoretical underpinning. It is also clear that explanation of networking with connection technologies requires more than empirical observations, namely specific political and communication. The first must specify what type of democracy is under examination. To date, now writing between 2015and 2017 there are no useful theories of digital media or political new media usage to be explain the relation between the network society and democracy.

Of course we do not have the pretention to offer a full-fledged theory of both democracy and digital communication. We only want to attain conceptual clarification and find promising starts for theories and empirical studies in the literature. We want to find usable conceptual frameworks of relating democracy and its political domain, the context of society and the particular characteristics of digital media in use. We hope to link these frameworks with existing general political and communication theories. In this way we hope to suggest some directions for actual theory development.

In the *Digital Democracy* book we summarized three main issues for further research that serve as the most important questions for the current book (Hacker & van Dijk, 2000, p. 220-222). First we called for further conceptual clarification. A concept to be elaborated is the network concept. What is the relation between concepts of politics and democracy on the one hand and the conceptual distinctions of network theory at the other hand? Is the rise of computer networks such as the Internet beneficial or detrimental to democracy? In these networks we also include cell phone and satellite networks, in fact all connection technologies. The answer to these questions can be aided by a further clarification of concepts we addressed in the former book. The concepts of interactivity, the public sphere, public debate, community building, political participation, universal access and information and communication freedom might change in the context of computer networks such as the Internet.

A further call was to test the basic assumptions in most perspectives of the opportunities and challenges of digital democracy. One of the assumptions is that the new forms of communication offered by the Internet can change communication content and encourage more political communication. We were rather skeptical, but not pessimistic about this assumption in the former book. New instruments of communication do not necessarily bring new politics, more political motivation or more participation. “No technology is able to ‘fix’ a lack of political motivation, lack of time, effort and skills required for full participation in democratic activities” (*ibid*.: 210). Yet this claim is made again and again. After 2000 blogging was assumed to have some revolutionary impact. In the year 2005 the claim reappeared with the perspective of the rise of participatory media in so-called Web 2.0. Shortly after, the social media were massively adopted in a short period of time. They are also used for political communication. Indeed, we know that after 2000 Internet users have become ever more active and creative on the Net, instead of just consuming website contents. But does this mean that they also become more politically engaged? The literature regarding political participation and uses of the digital media continue is marked by a conflation of correlation and causation in the relation of digital media use and political engagement.

A final call we made is for careful empirical observations of the effects of applications of digital democracy in evaluation research. Most often precise goals or expected effects are not formulated in advance. The beneficial contribution of these applications for democracy is simply assumed. It is a matter of belief. With this handicap in mind, we still want to make a careful balance of achievements and shortcomings of particular practices of digital democracy comparing them with particular goals and norms.

**Pitfalls in views of technology for politics**

In this book we will often come across doubtful reasoning about assumed effects of digital technology on political practices. Usually there are four questionable ideas or types of reasoning behind estimations of the consequences of new technologies. They have been listed a long time ago by Joseph Corn (1986)and we think they are still valid.

The first assumption is *the idea of a total revolution* assuming that new technologies will radically change our lives. In this context it means digital media will revolutionize the political system. This is a conspicuous refrain in many thoughts about the present and the future of technology. However, this refrain has resounded many times in history before. A first example is the invention of electricity that was estimated to lead to a radical decentralisation of society in the nineteenth century, notably just before the rise of massive bureaucracies. Another example is the advent of radio that spurred expectations that people themselves could become broadcasters and direct democracy would lie ahead. What actually happened was the rise of communism and fascism shortly afterwards and people had to listen to radio speeches of Hitler and Stalin. In the 1970s and 1980s people thought that new Cable TV with home boxes with remote controls to vote would support direct or tele-democracy (Arterton, 1987). The result was a system of 500 plus channels ‘with nothing on’, but commercials.   
 Currently, the same song can be heard. It is argued that the participative and decentralized nature of the contemporary Internet will fade away the traditional mass media and institutional politics. The first mistake of these determinist arguments is that technical opportunities are converted into social realities much too fast. Technological innovations rarely lead to societal revolutions straightaway. Technological innovations only drop into fertile soil when they join with social, economic and cultural innovations, subsequently perhaps accelerated and amplified by these technologies. The second pitfall is often wishful thinking. The hope that tomorrow will be better than today is the driving force behind the idea of a total revolution.

The second pitfall is the exact opposite of the former. This is the *assumption of social continuity*. Here new technologies are seen as mere continuous improvements of existing technology. The motor car was an improved coach. The Internet only is faster: it is an electronic highway. Potential societal effects do not bring much news. When television political marketing turned in social media marketing with the same objectives this did not seems to have any basic effect on contemporary election campaigns. What is wrong with this pragmatic and sober argument? In the first place this type of reasoning underestimates the transforming potential of using digital media. Not all changes brought forward with the aid of digital media are non-existing or merely incremental. The diffusion of the Internet in China transformed its totalitarian controlled public sphere in a few years. For the first time Chinese citizens could exchange messages to each other on a massive scale. But transformation is not yet a revolution. This would require structural changes in society. The Chinese Communist Party is still the only party in power and the Chinese are not free to act on the Internet.

This means that the technology itself can be revolutionary or disruptive sometimes. The most important revolutionary characteristic of present-day digital technology is the creation of an all-embracing, digitally enhanced infrastructure for our (network) society, the theme of this book. This might lead to a number of substantial social changes in democracies. Some of these changes will never be discovered following the argument of social continuity. They are called second order effects of new technology: social side-effects not foreseen.

A third type of doubtful reasoning is the idea that new technology can solve most, if not all social problems. This is the voluntarist idea of a *technological fix*. This is also called ‘solutionism’ (Morozov, 2013). The new technology such as new media is seen as a solution for a large number of societal problems. In politics Internet democracy is supposed to be the solution. It is assumed to support political participation, knowledge and efficacy and it will increase voter turnout. The obvious mistake in this simple reasoning is that it is much too superficial. The problems mentioned have much deeper causes. They are not to be solved by digital media as a set of instruments alone when no organizational and political measures are taken simultaneously. Moreover, in this argument a certain technology is often related to one particular effect only. Online elections are supposed to affect higher turnout. One ignores side-effects such as the secrecy of the vote when security fails and the loss of confidentiality of the vote in a separate room of a polling station disappears.

The fourth pitfall will be discussed very often in this book. This is *instrumentalism*. Often, technology is seen as some kind of lever. This is understandable because information and communication technology is a general purpose technology. It can be used for any purpose, good or bad. They can be liberating and controlling us. However, the instrumentalist view behind this is *much too simple*. The nuance is neatly summarized by Deibert & Rohozinsky (2013: 19): “Communications technologies are neither empty vessels to be filled with products of human intent nor forces unto themselves, imbued with some kind of irresistible agency. They are complicated and continuously evolving manifestations of forces at a particular time and place. Once created, technologies in turn shape and limit the prospects of human communication and interaction in a constantly iterative manner.”

In the instrumentalist view, technology is a *means* for a particular *goal*. They are perceived as tools to reach one’s own or societal goals. This view easily leads to the idea of a technological fix. However, the difference between the two is that the idea of a technological fix is always framed in a positive manner while instrumentalism can also be linked to negative uses and consequences. However, the most have a positive tenor. Social, political and communication research about the political effects of the digital media is infected by a the fever of instrumentalism. Thousands of articles and papers in the last twenty years have been written about the assumed effect of the Internet as an instrument for democracy toppling dictators, supporting political engagement and community building. The smartest authors carefully admit that it is actually *the use* of digital or social media that might have these effects. In fact, they hope that their favourite tool is doing the work wished for. So, the background idea still is instrumentalism. It does not have to be positive. Those who emphasize the supposed negative effects of digital and social media, such as dictators using the same tools to survey and censure these media and to manipulate their contents make the same pitfall. Digital media are not simple tools or ‘empty vessels’ to be used or filled with any purpose imaginable in particular circumstances.   
 The best argument against this using the digital media for both good and bad purposes is the fact that often completely different goals are reached than expected before. For example, one expects to save time using digital media, but in fact our calendars or schedules are filled immediately with more appointments and tasks because it allows us to accept them. In this book we will observe that the Internet offers free knowledge and information for everybody. Unfortunately, we also have to notice that bigger (digital) divides of usage and skills appear than before. These unforeseen effects are so-called *second order* effects. They usually have much deeper social causes than the *first order* effects expected by people using an instrumentalist view of technology.  
 Another argument against the instrumentalist view is that in fact goals and means are not independent. By many people the tools of free expression in the social media are supposed the have a democratic goal in its own way. Means and goals are confused and one forgets that there might me no effect in the particular political context at all. All those free expressions in the social media (a means) could have no, or only minor effect on a more democratic political system (goal). An even more popular confusion of means and goals is to mix-up participation and democracy. Often in this book we will observe that scholars, politicians and citizens confuse participation via digital media (a means) with democracy (a view of democracy with a particular goal). We will show that improving participation such as mobilization of citizens in the Arab Spring has *not* led to a more democratic system, and perhaps even to the opposite.   
 The confusion is amplified by another well-known idea of technology effects: the mutual shaping of technology and the social use of it. This means that both the instrument (the means) and the goals are continually reshaped. This idea is not a pitfall in itself, but it can lead to confusion. We just mentioned that people mix up improvements in social media for political use with mending democracy. A related problem is that a means is able to corrupt a particular goal. It can cause new problems. Sometimes the cure is worse than the problem to be solved. When governments offer e-participation applications consulting the citizenry about particular policy plans and do not give an adequate response to the input of citizens, a reaction often observed, they make things worse. Than citizens gain less faith in democracy. In the presidential race between Clinton and Trump in 2016 people suddenly realized that the use of social media in campaigns (the mean) not only have the goals of more information and participation outlets for voters, but also for manipulating them distributing disinformation, ‘fake news’ and micro-targeting messages enhancing ‘filter bubbles’. They caused new problems.   
 A final problem with the instrumentalist view is that the digital media are supposed to be instruments with affinity with particular goals. In this view the means (instruments) cannot be separated from the goals. And they are silent about the opposite goals. In this case digital technology is not a general purpose technology. In some respects technology can be defining, indeed. An example is the registration and control potential of digital technology. This cannot be cut out of this technology. Particular social effects of this potential, such as privacy loss can be contested but the registration and control potential remains. Sometimes the assumed affinity of a technology is not granted because it is one-sided. For example, the work of Manual Castells assumes a clear affinity of digital networks for liberation: they are contesting power (Castells, 2009, 2012). Much less attention in his work is paid for the opposite goal: the oppressive and control potential effects of digital networks. Affinity to these goals is assumed by dystopian views of digital technology in society and politics (Morozov, 2011). Both utopian and dystopian views of technology are biased because they are one-sided in only relating particular means or instruments with certain goals which are assumed and often desired.

**The social and material basis of democracy**

In this book the views of a total revolution, and its flipside of persistent continuity, a technical fix and instrumentalism are countered by views on technology that is primarily determined by the social and political context and actual media use of the digital media. Technology is not only defining but also enabling for users. The context should be framed in a historical perspective. Democracy as we currently know it, is only 100 to 200 years old. It was first created in Western nation states of Europe and the America’s as the aftermath of modernization, industrialization, economic growth and education for everybody. Other parts of the world followed with increasing development and decolonization, sometimes with other views of democracy than Western ones (see below). Lutz & du Toit (2014) distinguish waves of democratic upturns and downturns in the twentieth century. However, it is not certain that democracy will survive in the centuries to follow. Democracy in every view needs a solid and material base to flourish.

The first base is a particular level of economic performance and literacy. Otherwise citizens do not have the time and material or mental resources for democratic activities. The fact that currently democracy is on the rise in several developing countries is supported by economic growth, rising literacy and the spread of global and local media. It is possible to maintain that there is political progress in the world today in terms of the percentage of nations that are moving toward democratic systems. Since 1974, the percentage of states considered democratic increased from about 25% to approximately 60% in 1994 (Diamond, 2005). Notably, this increase predates the World Wide Web and large-scale use of digital communication. Other sources, such as the annual Democracy Index of 165 countries and two territories by the journalists of the Economist are less optimist about the evolution of democracy in the world after the advent of the Web. In 2016 they categorized 19 countries ‘Full democracies’, 57 countries ‘Flawed economies’ (including the U.S.A. after the campaign of Trump and Clinton), 40 countries ‘Hybrid regimes’ and 51 ‘Authoritarian regimes’. Some 72 countries experienced a decline in their total score compared with 2015. Now a majority of the world population lives in countries of the last two categories (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017).

Secondly, a number of institutional foundations of democracy are needed. Primarily, they need a modestly strong nation state, the context of all current democratic systems. So-called failed states prevent any democracy. Overly strong nation states are also not a solid base for democracy; they lean to authoritarianism. The rise of international terrorism is also likely to lead to authoritarian states that will choose for security curtailing freedom. When states are preoccupied with war, internal strife or competing terrorism citizen and democratic rights are almost sure to be restricted. The same might happen when waves of migration press a nation under pressure. Imagine that in the future tens of millions of inhabitants of Africa and Asia would overrun the Northern, Western and other affluent European and American countries fleeing for severe drought or flooding after climate change? We wonder why democracies of these countries will survive. The nation states concerned are likely to step up extreme oppressive measures and authoritarian anti-migration parties will prevail.

The nation state is also under pressure from globalization. International institutions such as the UN, the World Trade Organization, the International Criminal Court and federations or unions of nation states like the EU infringe on competencies of nation states. Loss of these competencies might not only mean a loss of sovereignty but also of democracy when these institutions are less democratic. Additionally, national states also lose control from international trade, financial markets and powerful transnational companies. The rise of the Internet and its global networking could undermine the power of nation states even more and perhaps make them less instead of more democratic.

Currently, in a number of Western countries a trend or movement against globalization is growing. This theme is covered by populist parties, both from the right and the left. Populism can be seen as a corrective or a threat to democracy (Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, 2012). As many anti-migration and national populist parties and candidates in Europe and the US have an authoritarian leadership democracy might indeed be under pressure.

Mueller (2011) argues that for democracy new Internet governance institutions should be created, not based on states but on individual networkers. However, van Dijk (2012) replies that this is not (yet) a realistic position. The power of networking should be accepted but has to be controlled by nation states networking themselves, effecting influence and creating trans-governmental agreements or treaties to manage Internet problems.

Another required institutional base of democracy is a working civil society between the state and the market. This means social and cultural associations in which citizens can organize themselves. It also means informal groups in which individuals with shared interests coalesce and pursue these interests within public space (Lutz & du Toit, 2014). Many developing countries do not have a strong civil society. Others have a civil society which is ripped apart by religious and regional strife. The coming of the Internet and the digital media with their organizing and opinion making capacities will not necessary support or feed to civil societies; these digital media may just as well enforce fragmentation and conflict in these societies.

A third base of democracy is not only sufficient material resources for the society as a whole but also their distribution. With high social and economic inequality democracy in practice fails because citizens so not have equal opportunities to participate in the democratic process. Many observers have emphasized that in the last decades social and economic inequality has increased substantially, both globally and nationally (e.g. Piketty, 2014, Stiglitz, 2013). Stiglitz shows that inequality in the US has grown so much that democracy is in peril. Fortunately, the advent of computers and the Internet only increase inequality, instead of decreasing it (van Dijk, 2005). It added the phenomenon of the digital divide. While potential resources of information and communication have become freely available on the Web, in reality some social categories are benefitting significantly more from these opportunities than others. Inequalities of skills and use of the digital media are increasing (van Dijk & van Deursen, 2014).

A last material and social base of democracy consists of the political efficacy of particular formal procedures of political and election systems of representation. More and more democracies become a *formal* democracy of election campaigns every few years. Many citizens and voters are disappointed about the results and the choices they have made at the ballot box. Many systems of elections and representation are immovable with insufficient influence for changes wanted by voters. The two party election system of the US has turned into a deadlock. The district and majority representative electoral system of the UK gives no chances for small and new parties or individual citizens. It is not certain that the alternatives and digital procedures and systems as discussed in this book will fare better.

*All these parts of the social and material base of democracy might be more important for the future and fate of democracy than the theme of this book: the opportunities and risks of digital democracy*. When we are discussing these opportunities and risks we will always relate to them.

**The (digital) media basis of democracy**

Democracy also requires a number of public media who are carriers for political information and communication. These media have properties that are both defining and enabling for practices of democracy. Some properties are equal in both old and new media. All public media should be open and free for both senders and receivers. They should be accessible for everybody in terms of costs and competencies of use and they should be different in terms of views and social support.

*General digital media properties*Other properties are different in old and new media. The traditional media of broadcasting and the press are produced and filled by professional journalists. The new interactive media of narrowcasting are created by both professionals and civic journalists or receivers. These digital media also offer affordances for new types of social interaction that did not exist in the far or near past. Online receivers can comment on anything that appears in the old and new media. Whether anyone pays attention to them is another matter, of course. The key point is that passive audience members watching movies or TV are matched by active users who also watch movies and TV but interact with each in ways that previous audience members did not.

These properties enabling to speak back look like new forms of participation. So, temptations arise to consider them as democratic participation and evidence of growing democracy. Clearly, users of new communication technologies enjoy the affordances that the technologies offer to them. They also enjoy many new releases and innovations that follow. They feel like progress toward greater personal empowerment. However, what any of this means to politics and political communication is yet to be explained in any convincing manner. Faster information, easier conversations, lower entry costs into discussions, websites, and texting, more sources of political information than ever before, and thousands of political resources available in seconds, all sounds like better information and potential participation. Yet without communication and political theory to evaluate these changes, we are only left with a bewildering amount of possible changes that can move both toward and away from democracy. Participation in content creation, interacting with others, composing emails, design websites, writing blogs, and publishing online documents looks like it might create or generate more digital democracy or political activism in general. However, participation, involvement, and engagement will not necessarily produce more democratic politics on the level of a nation or a political system.

These changes in political communication ecology cannot only be understood by a list of technology attributes, a survey of user patterns, or cultural changes that accompany the socio-technical changes. Rather, an analysis of how all of three of these work together in relation to political goals is required. It is certainly time to cease assuming any automatic political effect of Internet or new media adoption and usage. In the time that the Internet has become a mass phenomenon, there has been no accompanying surge in political participation in established democratic systems. It was never valid to assume that increasing network connectivity and digital media activity in society produces democracy without changes in political systems. It is all the more invalid to hope that the media technologies of the Internet or digital communication will fix deep problems of political motivation among citizens and crises of the political system at large.

Since our book of 2000, we have seen the collapse of two main assumptions about digital democracy. The first was automatic democratization with networks and the second was that new media simply are extensions of offline communication. Soon it became apparent that revolutions and democratization in societies require more than Facebook and Twitter. The idea that new media are simply more of what we do offline fell apart because people are doing things with digital media today that they are unable to do offline and their online political communication is increasing over time because the Internet of 2015 is quite different from that of 2000.

*New trends in digital media*Since 2000, two important trends appeared in the media system carrying political communication. The first is the rise of *spreadable media* (Jenkins et al., 2013). These are social (and other digital) media that spread or share contents between people such as citizens. This is different from the traditional ‘sticky’ media of broadcasting and other centralized allocution media serving steady contents for a relatively isolated and passive audience. In this way “the public is not simply consumers of pre-constructed messages but people who are shaping, sharing, reframing and remixing media in ways which might not have been previously imagined” (Jenkins et al.: 2).

The phrase ‘remixing’ refers to the second trend: the rise of a *hybrid media system* of cross-media linked and referring to each other (Chadwick, 2013). By means of cross-media political communication circulates between broadcasting or print media (offline and online) telephony and e-mail, messaging, websites or social media. In this way people such as citizens and political institutions “pursue their values and interests both with and within different but interrelated media” (Chadwick, p. 18)

*Network properties*One of the most important characteristics of the current digital media base of democracy are network properties. This is because increasingly digital media are networked. This book primary focuses on the relation to social and digital media networks in the context of the network society. Following network theory we are able to observe that all networks, whether used in social, political, economic or cultural exchange have properties that reveal particular effects.

The first effect of networks is that they become ever more powerful after a particular tipping point of connectedness has been reached. This is the point when they reach *critical mass.* It does not make very much sense to adopt a network connection, for instance for e-mail, when you can reach only two percent of your relationships with them. But when you can reach 30 to 35 percent this makes a difference and you are likely to think about getting connected. Then concerns with *network externality* appear: the network gets bigger and bigger, as if it grows automatically. This effect also is important for democracy. When only a small minority is connected to a network such as the Internet, this channel just cannot have much political influence. At least, it has a low democratic potential. When the network connects the vast majority of a population it might become ever more important. In the 1990s only a minority of the populations of the developed countries was connected to the Internet. These were the days of ‘television democracy’. Only fairly recently 50 to 90 percent or more of the people in these countries have gone online, and only now the era of ‘Internet democracy’ appears on the horizon.   
 The second network effect is *network exchange* that is working on the basis of the so-called peer-to-peer principle. In networks things are collectively produced by independent people who work at a distance and can nevertheless have a common goal as they are connected. This goal might be the exchange of music and video files, but it can also be the creation of an encyclopedia or a knowledge network. Therefore, the principle is also called the Wikipedia effect. Benkler (2006) has shown that this is a new way to create wealth in society that comes next to the classical production of individuals (such as authors) and organizations (such as media companies). It has become a new principle to create political opinion and action too. The collective production of political opinion and action in networks diverges from their traditional production by individual citizens, offline communities, political parties and broadcast or press media companies.   
 Thirdly, networks have a large number of more or less likely effects depending on their *global properties*. They are the size, the inclusiveness, the connectivity, connectedness, density, centralization and other properties of a network. They will be discussed in Chapter 2. We argue that in using networks these properties have a considerable political significance.

*Strategic characteristics of networks for democracy*Computer networks also have a number of more concrete strategic characteristics which are relevant because they are strategically important in defining the opportunities and limits of democracy. They are also part of the media base of democracy. We will describe five characteristics: access, design, control, legality or security and communication content. See van Dijk (2012: 253-263) for a more general discussion.   
 When networks are becoming the nervous system of society, *access to networks* must be the most vital characteristic. Absence of access, or marginal access simply mean social exclusion. In a democracy it means political exclusion and in a certain sense even disenfranchisement. This means that although non-electronic ways to vote will be offered for a long time to come, high-quality political and voting information will be limited to citizens with access to information and communication networks, primarily the Internet. Those not able to use them will only keep the formal right to vote but ever less the means to inform themselves as soon as traditional broadcast or press media are used less and less.

Who *designs the network* *infrastructure* for democracy and in what way? Contrary to nervous systems social and media networks are more or less constructed according to a plan. This plan for the information and communication infrastructure of political democracy can be designed following the model of the market(e-commerce), the forum(online deliberation) or a supposedly neutral technical information exchange. The choice very much depends on the view of democracy advocated (see below). Some views want to prepare the Web mainly for web-campaigning for elections. Here the same web-techniques are designed as marketing techniques in e-commerce selling candidates, parties and referendum choices or to convince voters. Other views want a Web for participation and deliberation in communities and discussion groups. In this case the design is focusing on interaction instead of sending targeting messages of persuasion. Again other views construct a Web designed by users themselves with their own websites, weblogs, social media profiles and messages.

Who *controls the network* infrastructure such as the Internet? Is it the government on behalf of citizens, is it the self-organization of the Internet (the Internet Society, ICANN and other bodies organizing the Internet) is it the web community and the users themselves? Or perhaps the market (Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Amazon and others)? There might even be a fifth candidate which is called ‘code’ by Lawrence Lessig (1999). This is comprised of the technical characteristics of the Web that can have a decisive influence on usage opportunities, among them democratic opportunities. The most important one is TCP/IP that defines the Internet as a public medium. Without this technical protocol the Internet would not be a decentralized network as we know it, enabling for instance peer-to-peer networking.

As the Internet has become a society by itself, struggles for control dominate this medium just like they dominate the society as a whole. These struggles for control most likely have effects on the opportunities of democracy both online and offline. In the 1980s and early 1990s the Internet was largely controlled by the web community and the Internet regulating bodies. After the breakthrough of the World Wide Web the Internet was commercialized and governments made their first attempts to control the network. Business corporations and national governments now try to control the Internet. Most important corporations are the American companies Microsoft, Google, Apple, Facebook engaged in fierce platform competition (van Dijk, 2012). All of them try to offer their own standards, applications and hardware such as operating systems, browsers, search engines, social networking sites, mobile phones and pads.   
 Waging political affairs online such as electronic voting might create new risks for failure, fraud and the secrecy of voting. This can only be prevented by special security measures. However, security measures could harm the privacy and civil liberties of citizens. Privacy and civil liberties are no absolute rights; they have to be weighed against other rights and duties. Yet, they can also be called basic rights of freedom. A society without civil liberties and privacy cannot be free. After ‘9-11’ the American, European and many other governments have infringed upon civil liberties and privacy. According to David Lyon (2003) they have done this in such a way that they have undermined social trust and democratic participation raising suspicion in society, conflicts between ethnic groups and withdrawal from public life. In this way, the top-to-bottom registration, control and surveillance capacities of computer networks tend to defeat their bottom-up capacities of transparency, self-regulation and public discourse.   
 Networks not only possess (infra)structures but they also carry *content*, among others of a political kind. The nature of communication might change in politics online. It can be expected that a transformation of political practice occurs that goes from politics as an oral and paper exercise to an activity of people typing on keyboards and watching at screens. Traditionally, politics is a matter of verbal skills, management capacities and the art of negotiation. It has always been a collective routine of talkers and organizers. When the use of computer networks and other digital media comes to dominate politics and democracy this routine would transform into an exercise of people working primarily as individuals in networking and using terminals, screens and interfaces. Or they would meet as before while continually using smart phones, other mobile computers and screens in meeting rooms. This might substantially change communication content as familiar digital media research shows.

*Mental effects and media routines using digital media*There is more than enabling and defining properties of old and new media for democracy. Obviously their concrete applications are most important. Using them might have mental effects and media routines not used before in the traditional media. Using contemporary digital media the technical properties of increasing visual information as compared to text, links of hypertext, and practices of brief perception or scanning of messages preferably in abstracts or fragments must have influence on human perception and cognition. It might also have effects on political information retrieval and communication. Reception might also include quicker responses to messages and more simultaneous monitoring of multiple sources of information. Attention spent on single sources of messages might be lower than previous kinds of message reception. It might be that brain and mind are reorganized processing digital media stimuli.

This calls for an extensive research program for neuroscience in retrieval of political information and communication. Very few empirical research has been done in this field related to political communication. Currently, we are in a stage of speculation with media authors like Nicholas Carr (2011) suggesting that a shallow perception of Internet use physically changes our brains. While we are not neuroscientists, we will at least call attention to media-psychological questions of perception and cognition of political information and communication in the digital media.

**Structuration of the basis of democracy**

How are the social or material and media basis of democracy related? This question can be answered by structuration theory, the other basic theory explaining digital democracy next to network theory in this book. Structuration theory was developed by Antony Giddens in the 1980s. Afterwards versions of this theory are created that focus on the role of technology and organization, such as adaptive structuration theory (Poole & DeSanctis, 2004).

Structuration means that social structures instantiated by rules and resources are continually transformed by human action. The core of structuration theory is that the structures of social systems are continually (re)shaped by action by people according to their views, norms and facilities. Technology such as digital media offer a kind of facilities. An important question in this book is whether and how the use of these facilities are (re)shaping a particular social system by changing its structures: a political system. Some of these changes are shaping democratic structures (rules and resources). A social system can be a society, an organization or a particular life-sphere, respectively working at a macro-, meso- or micro-level. In a political system structuration can change the macro-level of this system, for instance making it more or less democratic. At the meso-level political organizations such as political parties, communities and movements can be transformed by facilities such as the use of digital media. The same can happen with political (inter)action and communication at the micro-level between individual citizens.

To apply structuration theory to the use of digital media in political democracy the original model of structuration designed by Giddens (1984) is our point of departure. Completing the original model for the political domain we are filling in three modalities between political action and political systems. See Figure 1.2. The core of this model is the axis of the exchange between action and systems via the modality of technology such as digital media. This is the problematic of the majority of books, articles and papers about the effect of digital media on democracy. Unfortunately, there are two deficiencies about the solutions of this problematic in these publications.

The first is that the political context is often missing. The existing characteristics of the political systems and ongoing political action in which digital media are used are neglected. The focus is very much about the use of digital media by citizens for democracy increasing their political involvement and efficacy. This is the pitfall of instrumentalism as discussed before. In this context the other modalities drawn in the model are also ignored. These are the political interpretations (such as views of democracy) and political norms (such as the political culture of representation and daily political practice in particular countries). In this book particular views of digital democracy and typical digital practices comprising a particular digital political culture are very important. The viewpoint is not only one of power and domination but also the viewpoint of communication and signification and the viewpoint of sanction and legitimation of action and systems. In Figure 1.2 we have added an modality of communication and signification to the left, in this book discussed by communication theory and a modality of legitimation and sanction to the right discussed by political theory.



**Figure 1.2.** **A Structuration Model of Political Action and Systems***(inspired by Giddens, 1984:29)*

The second deficiency in these publications is that the problematic of digital media as a tool for democracy is one-sided. Instead of the interplay between political systems and action a bottom-up perspective of democratization of political systems via digital media involving people in political action is created. The top-down perspective for institutions of political systems confining and manipulating political action using digital media for surveillance, election marketing and persuasive government information is largely ignored. One of the reasons is that most (survey) research shows an individualist view of political action explaining it with individual characteristics such as political attitudes, knowledge or involvement and media use (Boulianne, 2009) . A relational view of collective political action in networks and organizations and communities is rare (Anderson and Paskeviciute, 2005, Campbell, 2013). The same goes for the system view of comparing political systems internationally in using digital media (Anduiza, Jensen & Lorba, 2012, Wolfsfeld et al., 2013).

A hard-core statement of structuration theory in political communication is about the continual interplay of politics and media with the result of a particular structuration (a change) of existing political systems. The pivotal question answered here is whether the use of digital technology really changes the structures (rules and resources as listed in Figure 1.2 in the top-box)of political systems and democracy. The principle here is politics first and media second. The dual statement is that changes in the political context lead to changes of media performance which in turn leads to further changes in the political context. This *politics-media-politics cycle* (Wolfsfeld, 2011) is in fact an example of structuration theory because media use changes politics and politics changes media use. This means that we in this book first depart from politics and political theory and second from (digital) media and media theory. The other modalities (communication - signification and sanction- legitimation) are just as important as the axis of power and domination via digital media. The two most important theories used to explain democracy in the network society in this book, structuration and network theory are both social or political theories and media or communication theories.

**Basic views and definitions**

*Digital democracy definition*

In this section we will define the two basic terms in the title of the book: democracy and network society. However, we start with a term that we already used several times above. In 2000 we defined *digital democracy* as a “collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT and CMC instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional ‘analogue’ political practices (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000: 1) This is a rather formal and instrumental definition that does not complete what democracy means. We gave this definition after having observed that several very different classical views of democracy are related to particular applications of the digital media in politics. Below we will discuss these relations concerning several views of democracy.

First we have to clarify what we want to change in this instrumental definition. The terms ICT and CMC have lost some popularity. Secondly, digital media and online communication are not mere addition to traditional media and offline communication. Increasingly these types of media and communication are integrated. For example, today political meetings are continuously supported by smartphones, wireless computer access and screens of broadcasting and networking including social media. Today we talk about digital media, networks and the Internet. So, fifteen years later we now want to define digital democracy as *the collective use of new information and communication technologies for practices of politics and democracy in both online and offline environments.*

Our focus is how this technology *use* and these *practices* affect changes in democracy as a system, specifically in the context of network societies. They are not simply instruments as discussed before. This technology also means more than using the Internet. This public medium all too often is equated with digital media, just like Internet politics is used as a synonym for digital democracy. In this book, we also discuss the influence of private and closed computer networks on politics and government. Both the private networks of (trans)national corporations and the internal networks of public administrations can have a big effect on politics and democracy. It is not justified to equate politics with ‘informational politics’ in the public media being the privileged space of politics, as Castells does: “outside the media there is only political marginality” (Castells, p. 312). Besides the Internet, though often connected to it, public media such as digital and interactive television and private media such as mobile telephony (including IM and WhatsApp) are also increasingly used for politics and for democratic experiments.

*Views of democracy*

Two typologies of democracy views are used in this book. The one is *basic and substantial* (ideological). The other is *strategic or procedural and formal*. We will start with the basic and substantial typology. Here often a distinction is made between liberal democracy, populism and authoritarian democracy (Welzel, 2013). Liberal democracy has social, market and conservative versions. The substantial items of interest here are free elections, equal rights and civil liberties with some additional items such as economic distribution and a welfare state in the social version of liberal democracy. The second basic view is populism with its basic ideological scheme of the people versus the elite. In left-wing populism the most important items are bread-and-butter and in right-wing populism it is law-and-order (Welzel, 2013). The third basic view is authoritarian democracy. Here the authority might be a particular religion, the military or a single party. This authority might dominate the government of a state, so that authoritarian democracy always leans to autocracy and risks to be undemocratic. Welzel (2013: has shown that this typology works in in international comparison of surveys of world views about democracy and human rights. In this book we accept that populism and even authoritarian democracy can be democratic. We do not want to lean on Western liberal views of democracy only. All the views mentioned have an affinity with a particular use of digital technology from complete Internet freedom to so-called networked authoritarianism (see following chapters).

The second typology lists procedural views of democracy which are strategic and formal. It is inspired by the models of democracy of David Held (1987). In this typology the strategic goal of democracy could be opinion or decision making and the means representative or direct democracy. Van Dijk (1996, 2000) have linked these models of with particular uses of digital media in politics such as online voting, web-campaigning, online discussions and government web-services. Most of them are classical (Western) views of democracy that are much older than the digital media.   
 The classical Western view on democracy is *legalist democracy* – a fully procedural view of democracy regarding the constitution and other laws and rules as the foundations of democracy. The three basic principles are: separation of powers (legislative and executive power, the judiciary); a system of checks and balances between the government, the public administration and the judiciary; and representation. In this view, the lack of information gathered and provided by the state is the most important democratic problem to be solved with the aid of digital media. Thus, they have to bring about an effective administration of government, a strong state and more security, among others with electronic surveillance systems. Furthermore, it can help to improve public support for the government. The means are electronic information and transaction services of the national and local government.   
 The second conception of democracy is called *competitive democracy*. It is mainly supported in countries with a two-party or a presidential system. According to this view, parties and leaders compete for the support of the electorate. This rather elitist view of democracy emphasizes representation and efficient decision-making by leaders. Digital media are first and foremost used for information campaigns and election campaigns. In the United States, a lot of experience has been gained with this use of digital media (Bimber & Davis, 2003, Newman, 1994; Rash, 1997, Selnow, 1994, Sunstein, 2002). Public information systems, electronic voting guides and tele-polling can help voters in their choice of the best leaders and policies.   
 Four other views of democracy have a completely different strategic orientation. Supporters of these views fight for a socialization of politics. This implies a less prominent role for governments and politicians and more for social organizations and individual citizens. The assumption is that computer networks such as the Internet will enable them to have a direct influence on politics, and even to bypass institutional politics or replace it with their own political relations. While views intending to strengthen institutional politics are mainly supported by politicians and administrators, these alternative views are defended by various social organizations and politically engaged citizens.

The most radical view compared to existing political practice is *plebiscitary democracy*. According to this view, political decisions have to be made through referenda or plebiscites. This implies a preference for direct democracy instead of representative democracy. The opportunities offered by computer networks to hold tele-polls or tele-referenda and to have online discussions have had an immediate appeal to the supporters of this view. They are said to revive direct democracy as practiced in the Athenian agora.

Another alternative view is *pluralist democracy*. In this view, opinion formation within and between social organizations is emphasized. Democracy is not the will of the majority but that of a constantly changing coalition of minorities. Its most important value is pluralism in social and political discussion and in the media. It is a combination of direct and representative democracy, since representation is exercised not only by politicians but also by societal organizations. Digital media offer numerous opportunities for pluralism in public debates, among them Internet debates, and for discussions within political organizations.

The fifth view discussed here is *participatory democracy*. Its supporters promote a socialization of politics, encouraging active citizenship. The emphasis lies on the broadest possible opinion formation about political affairs and on a particular combination of direct and representative democracy. Its most important instruments are public debates, public education and citizen participation in general. If the digital media are to play a positive role in enabling these instruments, access for all is vital.

The last view on democracy has appeared as a dominant model among the pioneers of the Internet community. This does not mean that the political views behind it are entirely new. Many observers have noticed the affinity of the Internet pioneers to the radical social movements of the 1960s and 1970s in most Western countries. These views range from classical anarchism and left-wing socialism to all kinds of libertarianism. The last are most important in the 1990s and after. The *libertarian view* is close to the pluralist and plebiscitary views in several respects, as the opportunities for (virtual) community building, tele-polling and online debates are proclaimed. Specific to libertarianism is the emphasis on autonomous politics by citizens in their own associations using the horizontal communication capabilities of computer networks in general and the Internet in particular. In its most extreme form, institutional politics is held to be obsolete and to be superseded by a new political reality collectively created in networks.

These views are summarized in Table1.1. Of course, these views of democracy are ideal types. In practice national political systems are characterized by particular combinations of these views. However, they clarify that the uses of digital technology in politics are not neutral. They often hide particular political preferences.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **PRIMARY GOAL**  **PRIMARY MEANS** | **DECISION MAKING** |  | **OPINION FORMATION** |
| **REPRESENTATIVE**  **DEMOCRACY** | LEGALIST  COMPETITIVE |  |  |
|  |  | LIBERTARIAN | PLURALIST  PARTICIPTORY |
| **DIRECT**  **DEMOCRACY** | PLEBISCITARY |  |  |

**Table 1.1: Six models in two dimensions of political democracy**

Source: Jan van Dijk in Hacker & van Dijk (2000, p. 39)

Shin (2015) argues that procedural definitions are most popular among scholars, while substantive definitions are more important among populations in the world. He has combined surveys, barometers and the like in the whole world and found that that the policy outcomes of governments are more important in evaluating a government to be democratic than democratic procedures. He also found that most peoples in the world have a poor informed conception of democracy. They can mention no or only one characteristic of what democracy means for them. Moreover, a majority is not able to make a distinction between a democracy and an autocracy. Even in the so-called democratic West forty percent of the population in this way reveals a poor informed view of democracy in surveys (Shin: 26).

*Network society definition*

The second most important concept in the title of this book describes the social context of digital democracy: the network society that is built on networks. This means that a network society uses communication networks as a primary means of social, political, economic, and cultural organization. In a network society, political communication is likely to depend heavily on online networking. While some scholars might still prefer the concept of information society, we think that the network society concept draws more attention to the structures, systems and types of communication that characterize politics and democracy. The information society concept is a *substantial* characterization of societies in which information increasingly is the primary means and product of all processes.

The concept of the network society is a *formal* characterization emphasizing a particular social (infra)structure and organization of contemporary societies. Van Dijk (1991, 2012) has defined the network society as “*a modern type of society with an infrastructure of* *social and media networks that characterizes its mode of organization at every level: individual,* *group/organizational and societal*” (2012: 24). He compares this classification of society with the mass society that is built on an infrastructure of groups, organizations and communities (‘masses’). According to van Dijk networks are becoming the nervous system of society, politics and democracy.

At this point, the reader might wonder which societies actually qualify as network societies and which ones do not. This is a very important issue, because a Euro-American centric perspective might assume that the rest world’s nearly 200 nations are operating with communication technologies in the same way found in Europe and North America. Manuel Castells defines the network society in terms of “a new social morphology of our societies”; he claims that the diffusion of a networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture (Castells, 1996, p. 469). There are two basic differences of Castells’ and van Dijk’s definition. First, for Castells (p. 410) networks already are the basic units of contemporary society while van Dijk argues that modern society is in a process of becoming a network society, but still consists of individuals, pairs, groups and organizations, be it increasingly linked by networks. The second difference is that for Castells the social morphology of networks is pre-eminent (dominant) over social action (Castells, p. 469) while for van Dijk networks are shaped in a dialectical interplay between structure and social action which means that human beings are continually shaping and changing network structures and technologies. (Also see van Dijk, 2012.)

Following Castells, Barney, another author of a book called ‘Network Society,’ defines “networks as the basic form of human organization and relationship across a wide range of social, political and economic figurations and associations” (Barney, 2004, p. 25-26). Among them are political figurations, together shaping something Barney calls ‘network politics’.

**Chapter overview of the book**

The following chapter analyses the technological characteristics of the networks shaping the networks society next to its social structures. It lists the enabling and defining properties of networks and their relevance for democracy. For instance, it is shown here that networks are not simply flat and democratic by nature, a common popular view. Networks for political communication have also powerful centers and structural constrains. They can also lead to undemocratic or even antidemocratic politics. Here, for example the concept of networked authoritarianism is discussed.

Chapter 3 is about participation and inclusion. It discusses the relation between digital media use and political participation or involvement and whether both political and digital participation change democracy and political systems or not. Furthermore, access, skills and use of digital media and networks for all citizens and inclusion or exclusion to the network society are primary questions here.

Chapter 4 describes the reconstruction of public space by means of networks and digital media reframing the classical concept of the public sphere by Habermas inspired by the communication channels of the mass society. Habermas’ normative concept of the public sphere is outdated. In this chapter we try to replace it with a neutral concept of a mosaic of public spaces in the network society. These spaces are a hybrid system of cross-media networks with online and offline communication combined. The properties of this system are observed.

Chapter 5, co-authored by Ben Mollov notices that online discussion in the public sphere often is very polarizing but that this is not the only outcome. Online discussion can also be used for conciliatory and depolarizing discourse in situations of collaboration and of the prevention or resolve of conflicts.

After these theoretical chapters we have added three chapters about practices of democracy in particular countries and in government practices called e-government. Two chapters are about countries with governing autocracies which according to some observers might become more democratic when citizens start to use digital media.

The sixth chapter is about the so-called Arab spring. Talk about Facebook and Twitter revolutions has become silent as Arab countries moved the other way to even more authoritarian regimes or even war and anarchy. The following chapter 7 is about the public and political use of the Internet in the Peoples Republic of China. Some observers argue that in China a public sphere is born created by the use of the Internet and other digital media and that this sphere is tearing up the totalitarian system. Is this really true?

The eight chapter is about e-government. E-democracy and e-government are related. Digital democracy cannot work when elected governments do not inform citizens and citizens do not inform governments about their needs. Services of information, communication and transaction for citizens can be offered in the same supply manner of the traditional business world. But they can also be designed in co-creation or participation with citizens.

The final Chapter 9 contains a summary of the statements and observations of this book and suggests steps ahead to advance theory in digital democracy research. Here the pivotal question will be answered in which contexts and conditions the use of digital media and networks leads to more or less democracy.