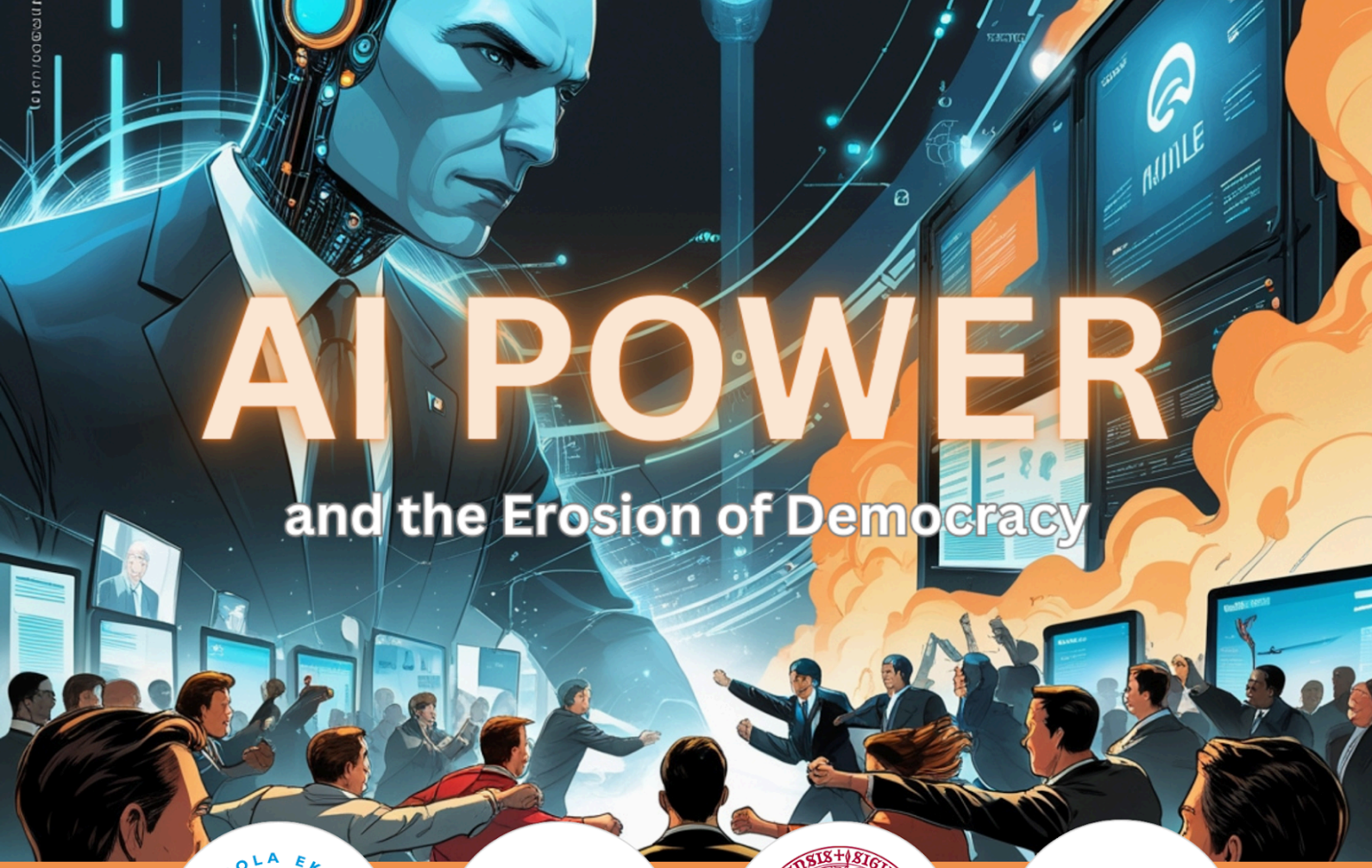

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Content

Introduction

This volume brings together contributions examining the impact of artificial intelligence on democratic governance, public discourse, and institutional legitimacy. While the individual papers differ in disciplinary background and methodology, they share a common perspective: artificial intelligence is not a neutral tool but a socio-technical force that reshapes power relations, cognitive habits, and the conditions of democratic agency.

Several contributions address the direct relationship between AI and democratic erosion. Petra Guasti analyses AI as both a threat and a potential safeguard for democracy, identifying risks such as disinformation, surveillance, algorithmic bias, and weakened accountability, while also outlining governance conditions under which AI may support democratic participation. Related systemic risks are examined by Kamil Matula, Anna Novotná, and Richard Antonín Novák, who focus on algorithmic power in the public sphere, the concentration of data and infrastructures, and the challenges these trends pose to transparency and democratic oversight.

The manipulation of public opinion and electoral processes forms another key axis of the volume. Jiří Korčák and David Pavlů situate election-related misinformation and influence operations as systemic features of contemporary digital environments, illustrating their arguments through a detailed case study of the 2024 Romanian presidential election. These concerns are extended beyond electoral politics in Jiří Korčák's separate contribution on AI-enabled scams and deepfakes in the creator economy, which highlights how everyday deception and secondary victimization erode epistemic trust and institutional legitimacy.

Broader structural and cultural contexts are addressed in several papers. Richard A. Novák examines artificial intelligence as an emerging axis of global power, linking advances in AI systems to geopolitical competition, economic inequality, and democratic sovereignty. At the level of media systems, Antonín Pavlíček analyses social media platforms as accelerators of democratic erosion, emphasizing how engagement-driven architectures fragment the public sphere and undermine institutional trust.

The cognitive and generational dimensions of AI-mediated environments are explored by Josef Praks and Petr Šajgal, who analyse the phenomenon of “brainrot” as a structural outcome of attention economies and platform design, and by Kamil Matula and Anna Novotná, who examine the values and political engagement of Generation Z. Together, these contributions highlight how algorithmic environments shape attention, political socialization, and the preconditions of democratic participation.

Beyond critical diagnosis, the volume includes applied perspectives on responsible AI use. David Pavlů proposes a practical framework for ethical and effective AI deployment in marketing, demonstrating how transparency and non-manipulative design can reinforce trust rather than merely constrain practice. Finally, a philosophical perspective is provided by Tomáš Sigmund, who articulates three models of the human–machine relationship, drawing on Arendt, Latour, and Baudrillard to frame competing visions of human agency in AI-mediated societies.

Taken together, the contributions reject deterministic narratives of technological progress or decline. Instead, they argue that the future of democracy in the age of AI depends on governance choices, ethical reflection, and the preservation of meaningful human agency within increasingly automated socio-technical systems.

Mgr. Ing. Tomáš Sigmund, Ph.D.

AI Power vs. Democracy Erosion

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KEYWORDS:

Artificial Intelligence – Democracy – Democratic Backsliding – Disinformation – Surveillance – Algorithmic Bias – AI Governance – Democratic Oversight

ABSTRACT:

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force in contemporary democracies, reshaping political participation, governance, and power relations. While AI offers unprecedented opportunities to enhance democratic processes, it simultaneously introduces significant risks that may accelerate democratic erosion. This contribution systematically examines the dual role of AI as both a threat to and a potential safeguard of democratic governance, arguing that democratic outcomes are not technologically predetermined but contingent upon political choices, institutional design, and governance frameworks.

The first part of the paper identifies five core threats posed by AI to democracy. These include the proliferation of AI-driven disinformation and political manipulation through deepfakes and micro-targeting, which undermine public trust and exacerbate polarization. AI-enabled mass surveillance threatens privacy and fundamental rights, producing chilling effects that weaken civic participation. Algorithmic bias and discrimination risk reinforcing structural inequalities and unequal political representation, while AI-driven interference in electoral

processes endangers electoral integrity through voter suppression, deceptive campaigning, and synthetic political actors. Finally, the increasing delegation of decision-making to opaque automated systems weakens human oversight, accountability, and democratic legitimacy in governance.

The second part of the contribution advances a counterbalancing perspective by outlining five key opportunities through which AI can strengthen democracy. AI technologies can enhance political participation by enabling personalized civic education, inclusive engagement platforms, and broader outreach to underrepresented groups. AI-supported transparency and accountability mechanisms—such as real-time fact-checking, corruption detection, and government watchdog systems—can reinforce ethical governance. In policymaking, AI-driven data analysis, sentiment tracking, and predictive analytics support evidence-based and responsive decision-making. Electoral processes may benefit from AI-enhanced cybersecurity, fairer administration, and protection against manipulation. Moreover, AI tools can promote inclusive governance by improving accessibility, detecting policy biases, and supporting equitable resource allocation.

The final part of the paper emphasizes the necessity of democratic oversight in AI governance. It argues that transparency, accountability, human-centered design, and citizen participation are essential to preserving democratic legitimacy in the age of AI. Given the global nature of AI development and deployment, international coordination and shared governance standards are crucial to prevent digital authoritarianism and democratic backsliding. The contribution concludes that failure to act risks accelerating democratic erosion, whereas proactive, democratically grounded AI governance can harness AI's transformative potential to strengthen trust, inclusion, and democratic resilience.

Misinformation and Influence Operations in Elections: Global Trends and the 2024 Romanian Case

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KEYWORDS:

Election Integrity – Misinformation – Influence Operations – Social Media – AI and Democracy – Hybrid Warfare – Romania – Digital Resilience

ABSTRACT:

The integrity of democratic elections is increasingly challenged by large-scale misinformation and influence operations operating within digitally mediated public spheres. Social media platforms, algorithmic amplification, and AI-enabled content generation have transformed elections into strategic targets for both domestic and foreign actors seeking to manipulate voter perceptions without direct coercion. This contribution examines global patterns of election-related misinformation and influence operations, with a particular focus on their technological mechanisms, governance responses, and democratic consequences, culminating in an in-depth case study of the 2024 Romanian presidential election.

The paper first situates election misinformation as a global and systemic threat. Drawing on comparative evidence from recent electoral cycles, it demonstrates that information manipulation has become a near-universal feature of contemporary elections, affecting democratic systems across regions and regime types.

Influence operations now combine social media bots, troll farms, microtargeted advertising, deepfakes, and “hack-and-leak” strategies to distort political discourse, erode trust in institutions, and exploit existing social divisions. AI-driven tools have significantly lowered the cost and increased the scalability of such operations, enabling rapid dissemination of persuasive yet deceptive narratives that often outpace fact-checking and institutional responses.

The second part of the contribution analyses institutional and societal countermeasures. Governments and international organizations have responded through regulatory frameworks, specialized agencies, platform co-regulation, and enhanced cybersecurity cooperation. Parallel efforts focus on strengthening societal resilience through media literacy education, public awareness campaigns, and fact-checking ecosystems. While these measures have improved detection and response capacities, the analysis highlights persistent enforcement gaps, platform governance limitations, and the structural difficulty of balancing counter-disinformation efforts with freedom of expression.

The core empirical contribution is a detailed case study of the 2024 Romanian presidential election, which represents a watershed moment in European democratic governance. The election was annulled following the exposure of a large-scale, foreign-backed online influence operation centered on TikTok and influencer-driven content amplification. The case illustrates how algorithmic visibility, covert coordination, and emotional narrative framing can artificially elevate political actors with minimal traditional campaigning, ultimately altering electoral outcomes. Romania’s unprecedented decision to invalidate the vote underscores the severity of information warfare as a democratic threat and reframes election interference as a matter of national security rather than solely media regulation.

The paper concludes that election integrity in the digital age depends on a multidimensional strategy integrating technological safeguards, regulatory accountability, platform

responsibility, international cooperation, and informed citizenry. As misinformation campaigns evolve alongside AI capabilities, democracies must treat information resilience as a core component of democratic sovereignty. The Romanian case serves both as a cautionary tale and as an emerging blueprint for democratic defence against algorithmically amplified influence operations.

From Deepfakes to Distrust: AI Scams, Secondary Victimization, and the Erosion of Institutional Legitimacy in the Creator Economy

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KEYWORDS:

Generative AI – Deepfakes – Epistemic Trust – Liar's Dividend – Online Scams – Secondary Victimisation – Institutional Trust – Creator Governance – AI Literacy – Platform Responsibility

ABSTRACT:

The accelerating diffusion of generative artificial intelligence is frequently discussed through the lens of political persuasion, electoral interference, and algorithmically amplified disinformation. This contribution advances a complementary perspective: democratic vulnerability does not emerge only from high-profile political deepfakes, but also from the everyday social consequences of AI-enabled deception—particularly scams—and from the institutional and cultural reactions that follow. Drawing on the lived experience of an independent online creator who uses generative tools selectively while investigating AI-driven fraud, the paper argues that the democratic harm of synthetic media operates along two intertwined pathways: (1) the erosion of shared standards of evidentiary credibility ("anything can be faked"), and (2) a parallel erosion of institutional legitimacy produced by the

stigmatization of victims (“anyone who believes this deserves it”).

The first analytical layer examines the contemporary “credibility crisis” created by synthetic imagery, voice cloning, and low-cost content fabrication. Viral AI-generated images of public figures—often circulated as jokes, provocations, or ambiguous satire—illustrate that the social impact of generative media is not determined by authorial intent but by audience uptake and platform dynamics. Even blatantly implausible fakes can be believed, while authentic documentation can be dismissed as “AI” once skepticism becomes the default interpretive frame. This dynamic extends beyond deception into what can be described as a generalized epistemic insecurity: individuals learn that visual and audio artifacts are no longer reliable anchors for shared reality. As a result, trust fractures in both directions—toward false positives (believing fakes) and false negatives (rejecting real evidence)—weakening the informational preconditions for democratic deliberation.

A second layer shifts from content authenticity to social consequences by foregrounding AI-enabled scams. Generative tools allow rapid production of persuasive fraudulent materials—synthetic celebrity images, cloned voices, spoofed identities, and seemingly corroborative media—at minimal cost and at massive scale. The contribution highlights a critical asymmetry: while many scams appear obvious in retrospect, they become far less distinguishable when they adopt personal markers of credibility (a familiar voice, a known phone number, contextual details, or emotional urgency). In such cases, deception exploits not only informational deficits but also relational trust. The democratic significance lies in the fact that civic trust and interpersonal trust are structurally linked: when the reliability of mediated communication collapses, individuals may withdraw from public engagement, become more cynical, or seek alternative epistemic communities that promise certainty.

The paper's central conceptual intervention is the notion of secondary victimization as a democratic risk factor in the age of AI. Victims of scams are often subjected to public ridicule, moral condemnation, and institutional dismissal—sometimes by law enforcement or media discourse—on the assumption that being deceived signals incompetence or irrationality. This reaction compounds harm: the victim is not only financially or emotionally damaged by the initial fraud, but also socially punished for having been harmed. The contribution argues that secondary victimization functions as a mechanism of democratic erosion by degrading institutional legitimacy. If citizens learn that institutions will not protect them, will shame them for reporting, or will treat them as disposable, the result is predictable: reduced willingness to cooperate with authorities, diminished faith in procedural fairness, and intensified resentment toward the public sphere itself. In other words, the "cost" of being deceived becomes not only personal but civic—trust in institutions is replaced by fatalism, anti-elitism, or disengagement.

Against purely technological solutions, the discussion evaluates proposed countermeasures through an applied governance lens. Automated detection and fact-checking systems may mitigate certain forms of synthetic media, but they risk becoming part of a recursive arms race in which detection tools must outpace generation tools, while remaining dependent on human judgment for final verification. Moreover, content moderation and fact-checking introduce a persistent democratic tension: interventions that reduce manipulation may also be perceived as censorship or viewpoint enforcement, particularly when evidentiary standards are unclear or politicized. The contribution therefore emphasizes that "proof" is not a purely technical endpoint but a contested social process—one that must balance openness, due process, and epistemic humility.

The final section proposes a pragmatic, intermediate route rooted in creator self-governance and professionalization. As independent creators increasingly function as public communicators without newsroom infrastructure, ethical

standards for AI use become a missing institutional layer. The paper outlines a model of voluntary association-based regulation: creators join a collective that offers benefits (e.g., legal support, credibility signaling, collaboration networks) while requiring adherence to ethical rules, including transparency about AI use and restrictions on manipulative practices. While such associations cannot eliminate unethical actors, they may increase the visibility and incentives of trustworthy practices, enabling creators to “crowd out” harmful behavior through collaboration norms and reputational mechanisms. This approach treats the creator economy as a civic intermediary rather than a purely entertainment domain—one with democratic responsibilities proportional to its influence.

The contribution concludes that democratic resilience in the AI era depends not only on regulating platforms or improving detection, but on rebuilding the social conditions of trust: protecting victims from stigma, strengthening institutional responsiveness, and developing credible norms for synthetic media in everyday communication. If citizens reach a point where they trust neither what they see nor those tasked with protecting them, democracy is weakened not by a single deepfake, but by the normalization of distrust as a way of life.

The Rise of AI: Transforming Global Power Structures

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KEYWORDS:

Artificial Intelligence – Global Power – Democracy – AGI – AI Governance – Digital Divide – Geopolitics – Agentic AI

ABSTRACT:

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) represents not merely a technological evolution, but a profound transformation of global power structures with far-reaching consequences for democracy, economic sovereignty, and social cohesion. This contribution critically examines AI as an emerging axis of power, comparable in geopolitical significance to nuclear technology, and argues that the current phase of AI development marks only the beginning of a long-term transformative period whose outcomes remain fundamentally contested.

The paper first situates contemporary AI within its technical foundations, tracing the progression from classical machine learning paradigms—supervised, unsupervised, and reinforcement learning—towards large language models (LLMs), foundation models, and the strategic pursuit of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). Particular attention is paid to composite AI architectures, including knowledge graphs, retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), vector databases, and agentic AI systems, which increasingly enable autonomous

decision-making across economically valuable domains. These developments signify a qualitative shift from narrow task automation to systems capable of reasoning, orchestration, and adaptive learning, thereby challenging long-standing assumptions about human cognitive dominance.

Building on this technical grounding, the contribution explores the economic dimension of AI power. The emergence of high-cost, specialized AI agents—ranging from professional knowledge assistants to PhD-level research agents—signals the formation of a new digital divide based not only on access to data and infrastructure, but also on affordability, skills, and institutional capacity. This stratification risks concentrating economic and cognitive power in the hands of a small number of corporations and states, reinforcing asymmetries both within and between societies. In this context, AI becomes a multiplier of capital and influence, reshaping labour markets, productivity, and competitive advantage at unprecedented speed.

The analysis then turns to the geopolitical implications of AI, framing current global competition as a de facto “AI arms race.” Similar to the nuclear race of the twentieth century, leadership in advanced AI systems may determine future balances of power, national security capabilities, and normative influence over global governance frameworks. The paper highlights how AI-driven power asymmetries intersect with ongoing geopolitical conflicts, intensifying strategic rivalries and raising fundamental questions about sovereignty, accountability, and democratic control.

Finally, the contribution addresses the democratic risks posed by AI concentration and governance gaps. As AI systems increasingly mediate information flows, economic decisions, and public services, the erosion of transparency, human oversight, and civic agency becomes a critical concern. The paper argues that without robust ethical frameworks, governance mechanisms, and inclusive policy responses, AI may undermine democratic institutions rather than strengthen them. It concludes by reframing the central dilemma of the AI

age: whether societies prioritize power accumulation and technological dominance, or human well-being, social trust, and democratic resilience in an era where intelligence itself is no longer an exclusively human attribute.

AI, Democracy, and Three Models of the Human–Machine Relationship

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KEYWORDS:

AI – Democracy – Three Models of the Human – Machine Relationship

ABSTRACT:

The accelerating development of artificial intelligence profoundly reshapes contemporary democracies by challenging traditional notions of agency, autonomy, and political participation. AI systems no longer operate as neutral tools that support human decision-making; instead, they increasingly influence public discourse, guide behavior, and structure the conditions under which political action becomes possible. This paper argues that understanding the democratic implications of AI requires a clear conceptualization of the evolving relationship between humans and machines. Drawing on the philosophical frameworks of Hannah Arendt, Bruno Latour, and Jean Baudrillard, the paper offers a tripartite model of this relationship: (1) the preservation of human dominance and autonomy, (2) the parity of humans and technological actors, and (3) the subordination of humans to technological systems.

AI introduces a spectrum of risks—epistemic, ethical, and political—that destabilize the symbolic foundations of democratic societies. Hallucinations, algorithmic opacity, bias, unequal data access, and the erosion of privacy produce

uncertainty and asymmetries of power. At the same time, the normalization of AI in everyday communication reduces interpersonal interaction, encourages cognitive outsourcing, and contributes to a decline in critical thinking and civic engagement. These developments intensify structural vulnerabilities in democratic systems, particularly in relation to misinformation, declining epistemic authority, and increasing polarization.

Against this backdrop, the paper examines three models of the human–machine relationship that offer distinct visions of how democracy might adapt—or fail to adapt—to technological transformation.

1. Human Dominance and the Preservation of Autonomy (Arendt)

From an Arendtian perspective, democracy depends fundamentally on human plurality, action, and judgment. Public space emerges only when individuals speak and act together, revealing themselves through their words and deeds. AI technologies, in this model, must remain subordinated to human purposes and embedded within a political framework that safeguards human autonomy.

This position insists that humans must preserve the capacity for initiative, the ability to deliberate, and the responsibility for action. AI may assist but must not replace political judgment. Technological systems that exert subtle influence—whether through personalization, prediction, or simulation—risk narrowing the space of appearance and undermining the conditions for genuine democratic agency. The Arendtian model therefore frames AI primarily as a tool whose power must be limited, ensuring that human beings remain authors of political meaning rather than subjects shaped by automated systems.

2. Symmetry Between Humans and Technologies (Latour)

Bruno Latour’s actor–network theory challenges the anthropocentric separation of subjects and objects. Technologies, in his view, are actors that participate in shaping

social reality; they have agency—not intentional in the human sense, but performative in their effects. From this perspective, democracy must expand to include a more-than-human assembly, sometimes described as a “Parliament of Things.”

In this second model, AI systems are neither mere tools nor dominating structures but co-constitutive partners in sociotechnical networks. Human action becomes inseparable from technological mediation. Political responsibility must therefore take into account the distributed nature of agency: decisions emerge from interactions among humans, institutions, infrastructures, and algorithms. Rather than resisting or subordinating AI, society must learn to integrate technological actors into democratic deliberation, acknowledging their influence and designing governance frameworks that reflect this entanglement.

3. Human Subordination and the Loss of Autonomy (Baudrillard)

Jean Baudrillard offers a radically different account: technologies do not support or collaborate with humans but progressively absorb and neutralize human agency. AI produces a world of hyperreality in which signs circulate without reference, simulations precede events, and information overwhelms meaning. Humans adapt to machines, not the other way around.

In this third model, the logic of technological systems becomes the dominant organizing force of society. AI anticipates actions, shapes preferences, and generates realities that individuals merely inhabit. Political action collapses into symbolic gestures; public discourse becomes noise; and democracy loses its grounding in human initiative. Baudrillard’s framework interprets technological governance as a form of soft domination, where individuals remain formally free but substantively guided, seduced, or absorbed by operational systems that exceed their understanding.

Conclusion: Democracy at the Crossroads

The tripartite model demonstrates that the democratic implications of AI cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy of optimism versus pessimism. Instead, democracy today navigates between:

- Arendt's call to preserve human autonomy,
- Latour's invitation to rethink democracy as a hybrid collective, and
- Baudrillard's warning that technological systems may dissolve human agency altogether.

The future of democracy will depend on how societies negotiate these three visions. Will AI remain a controlled instrument that expands human freedom, become an equal participant in political networks, or evolve into a dominant structure that reshapes humanity in its image?

Democratic renewal in the age of AI requires a philosophical rearticulation of human–machine relations. Only by confronting these competing models can we design institutions, regulations, and cultural practices that protect meaningful human agency while acknowledging the inescapable presence of technological actors in political life.

Artificial Intelligence and the Erosion of Democracy: Risks, Power, and Responsibility

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KEYWORDS:

Artificial intelligence – Democratic Governance – Algorithmic Power – Computational Propaganda – Responsible and Ethical AI

ABSTRACT:

Artificial intelligence has become a central force in shaping contemporary societies, profoundly influencing how information is created, filtered, and disseminated in the public sphere. While AI-driven systems promise efficiency, personalization, and innovation across multiple domains, they simultaneously introduce structural risks to democratic governance. This contribution critically examines the multifaceted relationship between artificial intelligence and democracy, with particular attention to ethical challenges, power asymmetries, and the conditions under which democratic values may be weakened or reinforced.

The first part of the discussion focuses on the transformation of the public sphere through algorithmic mediation. Recommender systems and data-driven personalization increasingly determine

what information individuals encounter online. Optimized primarily for engagement and attention, these systems contribute to the fragmentation of public discourse, the reinforcement of ideological echo chambers, and the accelerated spread of misleading or manipulative content. Such dynamics challenge core democratic prerequisites, including informed deliberation, exposure to diverse perspectives, and the existence of shared factual ground.

A second analytical layer addresses the issue of power and control in the AI ecosystem. The development and deployment of advanced AI systems depend heavily on access to vast datasets, computational resources, and proprietary algorithms. These assets are largely concentrated in the hands of a small number of global technology corporations, raising critical questions about accountability, transparency, and democratic oversight. The contribution illustrates how AI technologies can be instrumentalized for political persuasion, computational propaganda, and large-scale surveillance, thereby reshaping power relations between citizens, states, and private actors.

The final part of the contribution turns to responsibility and possible responses to these challenges. It explores the role of ethical frameworks, regulatory approaches, and AI literacy as complementary strategies for mitigating democratic risks without unduly constraining technological development. Emphasis is placed on the importance of empowering citizens to understand algorithmic systems, their incentives, and their societal consequences. Rather than framing artificial intelligence as inherently incompatible with democracy, the discussion highlights conditions under which AI may also support democratic processes—for example through improved access to information, civic participation, or public-sector transparency—provided that ethical principles and democratic accountability are embedded by design.

Conceived as an interactive, audience-engaged discussion, this contribution seeks to stimulate critical reflection among students, academics, and practitioners. By moving beyond

simplistic narratives of technological optimism or dystopian threat, it offers a nuanced perspective on how democratic governance can be critically rethought and actively protected in the age of artificial intelligence.

Generation Z: Ideals, Engagement, and the Future of Democracy

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KEYWORDS:

Generation Z – Democratic Engagement – Political Socialization – Algorithmic Mediation – AI and Society – Civil Education – Digital literacy – AI literacy

ABSTRACT:

Generation Z has entered adulthood at a time marked by profound political, technological, and societal transformations. As the first generation of true digital natives, Gen Z is deeply embedded in online environments, social media platforms, and algorithmically mediated information systems. This contribution examines the values, political attitudes, and forms of civic engagement characteristic of Generation Z, and explores their implications for the future of democratic governance in an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence.

The first part of the contribution outlines the defining characteristics of Generation Z from a global perspective. Gen Z is often described as the most educated and technologically proficient generation to date, yet also as one of the most anxious and uncertain about the future. Strong exposure to digital media has shaped not only communication habits but also identity formation, value orientation, and perceptions of authority. While technology—including AI-driven systems—is often perceived as a natural and indispensable part of everyday

life, this familiarity does not necessarily translate into uncritical trust in institutions or political processes.

The contribution then turns to the ideals and political attitudes of Generation Z. Existing research suggests a complex and sometimes contradictory value landscape. On the one hand, Gen Z expresses strong commitments to transparency, social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability. On the other hand, levels of trust in traditional democratic institutions, political parties, and representative mechanisms appear diminished. Political attitudes oscillate between liberal and conservative positions, often shaped by cultural context, regional differences, and mediated online discourse rather than stable ideological alignment.

A key analytical focus is placed on the role of digital platforms and artificial intelligence in shaping political engagement. Algorithmic curation of content, influencer-driven communication, and the emotional dynamics of social media contribute to new forms of political socialization. These mechanisms may foster activism and awareness, but they can also encourage political polarization, short-term mobilization without long-term commitment, or disengagement and political nihilism. The contribution critically reflects on how AI-mediated environments influence political attitudes, participation patterns, and perceptions of democratic legitimacy among young people.

The final part of the contribution addresses the broader question of what Generation Z means for the future of democracy. Rather than framing Gen Z as either a democratic saviour or a disengaged generation, the discussion emphasizes ambiguity and structural conditions. It argues that the democratic potential of Generation Z depends not only on individual values but also on the design of technological systems, the quality of civic education, and the capacity of democratic institutions to adapt to changing expectations. Attention is given to the role of digital and AI literacy as a prerequisite for meaningful democratic participation.

By combining insights from political sociology, media studies, and ethics of artificial intelligence, this contribution offers a nuanced perspective on Generation Z as a key factor in the evolving relationship between democracy and technology. It invites students, academics, and practitioners to reconsider how democratic engagement can be supported in a digitally saturated and algorithmically governed public sphere.

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General brainrot in the media

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KEYWORDS:

Brainrot – Social media – Neuroplasticity – Dopamine systems – Generation Z – Attention – Cognitive functions – Digital hygiene – Media literacy – Attention economy

ABSTRACT:

Introduction and context

This semester paper defines and analyzes the popular phenomenon and term "brainrot," which was named the word of the year 2024 by Oxford University Press. This phenomenon defines a state of mental passivity and reduced cognitive activity as a result of excessive consumption of low-quality digital content on social media. Between 2023 and 2024, the percentage frequency of use of this term increased by 230%, confirming its growing relevance in the discourse of younger generations, particularly Generations Z and Alpha. It is important to note that although this term has become popular relatively recently and has taken on a whole new dimension, the first mention of it dates back to 1854 by Henry David Thoreau.

The work of two authors also examines how social media transforms cognitive abilities and social behavior, especially in already defined generations. At a time when the average person spends more than six hours a day online, the authors believe it is necessary to understand the mechanisms of this phenomenon and its impact on the human psyche.

Theoretical background

Neuroplasticity and digital adaptation: The brain adapts to the types of stimuli it processes most often. According to a neuroimaging study, changes have begun to be documented in the prefrontal cortex, striatum, and amygdala: executive functions and self-control, reward processing, and emotional regulation. In an environment where short pieces of content change rapidly, information is processed in a fragmented manner according to the principle of "neurons that fire together; wire together."

Dopamine systems: Social media is based on the assumption of a variable reward ratio. Every like, comment, or interesting piece of content triggers the release of dopamine, which escalates into an addictive cycle. Constant and uninterrupted stimulation can lead to desensitization of receptors, requiring increasingly intense and frequent stimulation to achieve the same or even stronger satisfaction.

Attention economy: In their work, the authors argue that human attention is the most valuable commodity in the digital age. Platforms use manipulative techniques in their functionality (infinite scroll, autoplay, strategic timing of notifications, FOMO) to maximize the time spent online.

Mechanisms of creation and dissemination

The role of algorithms: Every social platform, whether Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok, has a recommendation algorithm that analyzes hundreds of data points about user behavior and creates personalized loops that reinforce addictive behavior. Algorithms prefer content that evokes strong emotions, leading to radicalization spirals, emotional manipulation, and the creation of so-called echo chambers.

Viral culture: Brainrot spreads best virally through memes and hashtags. An interesting perspective on the situation is that the term is often used with humorous connotations and self-reflexively, albeit ironically, serving as a pseudo-compensatory mechanism, building generational identity, and as a form of cultural criticism.

COVID-19 as a catalyst: The pandemic has not only dramatically accelerated the trend toward digital consumption, but also transformed the behavior of the average consumer. Lockdowns have led to the normalization of excessive screen time and the development of habits that often persist even after the pandemic is over.

Preventive measures and solutions

Digital hygiene: Effective strategies include setting time limits, creating digitally clean spaces, regular digital detoxes, and consciously choosing quality content.

Practical strategies: Research has identified effective techniques such as screen-free morning routines, a modified Pomodoro technique, and the concept of a "digital sabbath"—one day a week completely free of screens.

Conclusion

Brainrot is a significant social problem that much of the younger generation still considers humorous, but the work points to the pessimistic and negative consequences of the current design of digital technologies. The impact of brainrot may not be permanent, but it is essential to understand the mechanisms of the phenomenon and to develop a conscious and critical approach to technology, the difference between the digital and analog worlds. The authors' work does not seek to force readers to abandon technology, but rather to encourage them to take a more critical view of the tools they use on a daily basis.

Bridging the Gap: A Practical Framework for Ethical and Effective AI in Marketing

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KEYWORDS:

Artificial Intelligence – Digital Marketing – AI Ethics – Content Generation – Trustworthiness – Marketing Effectiveness

ABSTRACT:

This paper addresses the growing disconnect between abstract ethical principles and the practical implementation of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in digital marketing. While AI tools like ChatGPT are rapidly becoming indispensable for activities ranging from audience segmentation to automated content generation, they introduce significant risks regarding transparency, fairness, and consumer trust. Current academic and industrial guidelines often remain too theoretical or compliance-focused to provide actionable support for daily marketing workflows, leaving practitioners without clear tools to navigate the intersection of persuasion and responsibility.

Written by a member of the Prague Data Ethics Lab, this work proposes a comprehensive study designed to bridge this gap by developing an empirically grounded framework for responsible AI content generation. The research challenges the prevailing assumption that ethics acts merely as a constraint on business performance. Instead, it posits the central hypothesis that ethical alignment—specifically through transparency and non-manipulation—can actively reinforce marketing effectiveness.

The methodology adopts a multi-phase, iterative approach. The first phase involves semi-structured interviews with marketing professionals and AI practitioners to identify recurring ethical tensions and real-world constraints in current workflows. These insights, synthesized with existing normative literature, will inform the design of a practical tool, such as a checklist or a reusable prompt schema. In the subsequent experimental phase, this framework will be tested in controlled A/B scenarios. The study will measure the impact of ethically enhanced content on both behavioural metrics (e.g., click-through rates, conversions) and perceptual indicators (e.g., user trust, perceived relevance, and fairness).

By combining qualitative inquiry with experimental validation, this thesis aims to produce a robust, adaptable tool that helps organizations navigate the complexities of AI adoption. Ultimately, the work seeks to demonstrate that integrating ethical values into the design of marketing tools is not just a reputational safeguard, but a strategic driver of long-term value and user engagement.

Platforms of Distrust: How Social Media Accelerates the Erosion of Democratic Life

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Democratic erosion – Social media platforms – Disinformation – Algorithmic amplification – Public sphere – Political polarization – Platform governance – Institutional trust

ABSTRACT:

The presentation addresses how social media platforms are rapidly eroding democratic norms, institutions, and civic culture. Contrary to initial hopes that digital networks would drive democratization, the last decade has exposed a darker side: the mechanisms that foster connection also serve as powerful tools for manipulation, extreme polarization, and destabilization of institutions. This discussion places these effects within the context of a transformed public sphere. It argues that communication ecosystems dominated by these platforms fundamentally alter how citizens receive information, construct their political identities, and participate in democratic life.

The talk begins by revisiting the optimistic assumptions that accompanied the rise of social media—particularly the belief that increased access to information and participatory tools would strengthen democratic engagement. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, the presentation demonstrates how these assumptions underestimated the structural incentives embedded in platform design. Rather than fostering deliberation, social media environments privilege speed,

emotional intensity, and virality, creating conditions in which misinformation and outrage flourish more readily than reasoned debate.

A central argument of the presentation is that the erosion of democracy is not merely a by-product of malicious actors but a predictable outcome of the platforms' underlying business models. Engagement-driven algorithms amplify divisive content because it captures attention, while micro-targeted advertising enables unprecedented forms of political segmentation. These mechanisms fragment the public sphere into isolated informational micro-universes, weakening the shared epistemic foundations on which democratic decision-making depends. The talk highlights how this fragmentation contributes to rising political tribalism and the normalization of extreme viewpoints.

The presentation then examines the role of disinformation and coordinated manipulation campaigns. While misinformation has always existed, social media dramatically accelerates its spread and obscures its origins. The talk discusses how state and non-state actors exploit platform vulnerabilities to influence elections, sow distrust, and destabilize democratic institutions. Case studies from the United States, Brazil, India, and several European contexts illustrate how these tactics adapt to local political cultures while relying on similar technological affordances.

Another key theme is the crisis of institutional legitimacy. Social media platforms have become arenas where trust in democratic institutions—courts, parliaments, electoral systems, and the press—is systematically undermined. The presentation explores how conspiracy narratives, anti-media rhetoric, and algorithmically amplified skepticism erode citizens' confidence in the very structures that sustain democratic governance. This erosion is not only ideological but also emotional, reshaping how individuals perceive authority, expertise, and collective responsibility.

The talk also addresses the tension between platform governance and democratic accountability. Content moderation

systems remain opaque, inconsistent, and often reactive rather than preventive. The presentation evaluates current regulatory efforts, including the European Union's Digital Services Act, and considers their potential to reshape platform incentives. However, it argues that regulatory interventions alone cannot resolve the deeper structural conflict between profit-driven platform logic and the public interest.

The presentation concludes by reflecting on the ambivalent nature of social media. While platforms can amplify harmful dynamics, they also enable new forms of civic mobilization, community building, and political participation. The talk argues that the future of democracy in the digital age will depend on our ability to harness these positive potentials while mitigating the systemic risks embedded in current platform architectures. Ultimately, safeguarding democratic life requires not only technological and regulatory innovation but also a renewed commitment to shared civic values and collective responsibility.

Closing Word

The contributions collected in this volume demonstrate that the relationship between artificial intelligence and democracy cannot be reduced to questions of technology alone. Across empirical analyses, theoretical frameworks, and applied perspectives, the authors show that democratic outcomes depend on governance choices, institutional design, and the preservation of human agency in AI-mediated environments. Rather than offering definitive answers, the volume aims to clarify key tensions, risks, and responsibilities that shape contemporary democratic life. It is our hope that these contributions will support further interdisciplinary dialogue and inform both scholarly debate and practical approaches to AI governance in democratic societies.

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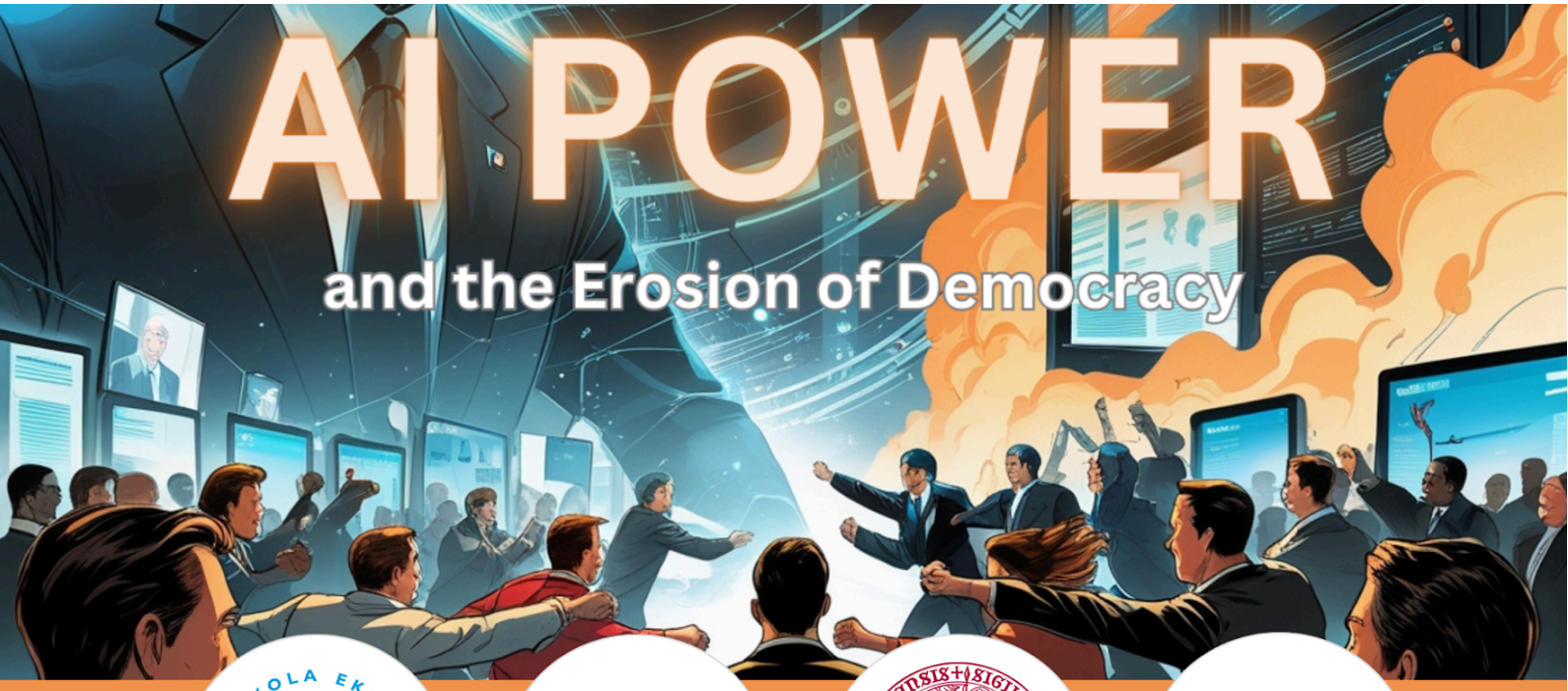

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