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Rebranding and Monetization of Twitter/X: Is Musk's Freedom of Speech/Expression a Reality or a Myth?

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Abstract

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Keywords: Freedom of Expression, Monetization, Twitter, Free Speech

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Abstract

The primary motive for this research is to understand the extent of freedom on Social Media platforms especially when they are monetized. This research examines the impact of Elon Musk's policy change on the consumer experience of X (previously called Twitter). This research employs Foucault's framework of power and its dynamics to investigate the true value of the freedom that these social media outfits claim to offer. The article affirms the intricacies and shortcomings of monetization in consumer experience. This also demonstrates the indoctrination of capitalism in every human experience in this century. This research attempts to investigate the inequalities in the provision of fundamental rights to human beings by non-state actors and the lack of accountability in this paradigm of society. This article also debunks the myth of a 'safe political space' for citizens advocated by philanthropists on e-platforms such as X.

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Introduction

Discussions of freedom of speech normally focus on the rights of the individual. However, the benefits of freedom of expression, even under traditional theory, frequently belong as much to society as to the individual, and the benefits flowing to society may indeed be different than individual rights. For example, in the well-regarded democracy theory propounded by Professor Meiklejohn, the direct benefit of the individual's right to engage in political discussion is the advancement of democratic government which is clearly a societal benefit. While good government may be of benefit to the individual, the existence of democracy is societal or belongs to the group rather

than just an individual. A central feature of Durkheim's approach to sociology is that society is not merely a collection of individuals but is more akin to a living organism constituted of millions of living cells. While the cells possess aspects of life, the organism has a character and existence distinctly unique from its constituent cells. Similarly, society has an existence separate and apart from the individuals occupying the social group, and the social group may be studied as having its own distinct existence. In this discussion, the focus will be on freedom of expression having direct and virtually independent benefits to the social organism as opposed to the real but distinct benefits to the individual members of society. This idea will be



analyzed with the modern viewpoint regarding social media and its usage. The proportion at which social media offers liberty to speak up and record their voices is always under a critical lens.

Recently, a social media platform, X which was previously called Twitter, has been taken over by an American philanthropist, Elon Musk who promised to make the platform a safe space for political and social discourse. The change that was deemed revolutionary had its contrary outlook. For some financial reason, Musk nurtured this idea that those who have money can have more freedom than others by removing official ticks from the celebrity accounts making it difficult for people to recognize the official accounts among a number of fake ones. Now, Musk's idea of equality does not care for equity if one has money. This paper will argue if freedom of speech is a right or a commodity.

Literature Review

The difficulty in establishing the appropriate metaphor for what Facebook is makes it equally challenging to find the right regulatory response to its human rights impact (Casero-Ripollés, Andreu [2018](#)). “Facebook is not a media corporation with an editor-in-chief subject to media regulation; however, its widespread use makes it as powerful as traditional media companies in many cases. Scholars have referred to Facebook as a public infrastructure or utility, essential for social and political participation in the twenty-first century and accessible for all” (Balkin 2017; Zuckerberg, Mark [2019](#)). “Social media is a privately governed sphere – and legally a commercial service – free to define what is allowed and what is not. While Facebook refers to itself as a global community, it is effectively governed by commercially defined rules and norms largely inaccessible to its community” (Fisher, Max [2018](#); Hansen, Isabella and Lim, Darren J. [2019](#)); Locke, John (1690/[1975](#)). Rothbard would perhaps say, “one of the examples of negative rights are communication rights (or the right of free speech, which, although not the same, in this case can be used as synonyms). Take, for example, the “human right” of free speech. Freedom of speech is supposed to mean the right of everyone to say whatever he likes. But the neglected question is: Where? Where does a man have this right? He certainly does not have it on the property on which he is trespassing. (Zhang et al., [2023](#)) In short, he has this right only on his own property or on the property of someone who has agreed, as a gift or in a rental contract, to allow him on the premises. In fact, then,

there is no such thing as a separate “right to free speech”; there is only a man's property right: the right to do as he wills with his own or to make voluntary agreements with other property owners” (Rothbard, [1977](#): 238-239). “Communication rights can be understood as the right to engage freely in communication without unwanted interference. But Rothbard makes a very important point by formulating the idea that human rights (including free speech) mean that people are only free to use their resources for expressing their ideas, and their freedom to do so will depend on the availability of these resources (McLeod et al., [2023](#)). This, however, does not mean that some third party is obligated to provide the resources to those who want to exercise free speech. To put it simply, communication rights are determined by and are limited by, property rights” (Rothbard, [2019](#)).

Such papers and findings show how much the monetization factor is ignored by analysts when it comes to social media or e-platforms of media. In this paper, the impacts of premium subscriptions and ad revenues will also be studied with regard to narrative shaping.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this paper is critical discourse analysis where the arguments of several theorists and critics will be examined in order to understand their viewpoints and derive a conclusion on whether the monetization of social media platforms ensures freedom of expression or make it unreachable for man in the street.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the context of freedom of expression with regards to Twitter or broadly social media, this paper will frame the argument around the findings of Durkheim who has proposed the law of expression. Durkheim contemplated the evolution of social change with respect to individual rights. Durkheim argued that “as the division of labor increases and society becomes more specialized, individual members of a society acquire greater autonomy and acquire wider personal rights in proportion to the complexity of society: But the further one travels in history, the more one is aware of the process of change. In the early stage, the individual personality is lost in the depths of the social mass, and then later, by its own effort, breaks away. From being limited and of small regard, the scope of the individual life expands and becomes the exalted

object of moral respect. The individual comes to acquire ever wider rights over his own person and over the possessions to which he has title; he also comes to form ideas about the world that seem to him most fitting and to develop his essential qualities without hindrance" (Durkheim, p. 2). However, the second part of the question is still relevant when we see how monetization breaks this law of expression. This paper will affirm how individual autonomy is compromised by the shackles of finances and branding of platforms.

Analysis

It is important that the freedom to communicate necessitated by organic solidarity is not limited to matters only relating to government but rather extends to all aspects of social life. In the idealized primitive society. Where mechanical solidarity prevails, everyone is engaged in the same activity as hunter-gatherers, and all beliefs and activities are commonly shared; there are no negotiations among individuals and the worldview is uniform. Freedom of speech is not simply desirable from a philosophical point of view, but it is essential for the survival of highly industrialized societies. This viewpoint is not at odds with traditional constitutive and instrumental justifications for freedom of speech. In fact, the traditional free speech concepts undoubtedly connect to the sociological explanation, and the sociological argument supports the view that the constitutive justification for freedom of speech is actually instrumental, that is, broad generalized speech rights are essential to the smooth running of complex societies. The connection between sociology and philosophy will in part be found through an expansive interpretation of the free speech theory known as "self-realization" that contains elements of both instrumental and constitutive justifications for freedom of speech. The sociological explanation offered by Habermas demonstrates how self-realization is not just desirable from a philosophical point of view but is also required for individuals to effectively and happily function in advanced societies. If the sociological explanation is correct, the prognosis for advanced societies that employ legal systems to restrict freedom of speech unduly may not be so good. Social disintegration may be the ultimate consequence of the disconnect between law and society.

Durkheim sociologically presents a case for freedom of expression based on the social division of labor. As mechanical solidarity or group conscience diminishes, the concept of self-advances and the

individual comes to form personal ideas. In other words, the division of labor creates a situation where individualized communication without governmental hindrance is essential. In a totalitarian political environment, such as the People's Republic of China, communication concerning political matters is highly restricted. But, in the economic sphere where free markets rule, speech is relatively unrestricted because this is necessary. Communication is the medium of the lifeworld. System, on the other hand, is an external force embedded into and channeling the lifeworld. By system, Habermas is referring to forces such as the capitalist economy and political structures that guide the behavior of members of the lifeworld. The lifeworld is self-standing as it consists of people relating with each other while the system can only exist to the extent it is embedded within the lifeworld. While lifeworld operates through consensus, systems impose external constraints on the behavior of lifeworld participants. Habermas sees a tension between the lifeworld and the system in which the latter is constantly intruding on the former. In his view, the world, built on communication and consensus among members of society, is always subject to disharmony or "social pathologies" caused by the intrusion of the system which can modify the behavior of citizens.

John Stuart Mill offered "two main qualifications for the immunity which freedom of expression should, as a general rule, enjoy, and in an earlier article concerning freedom of the press he formulated two other qualifications. He did not introduce them systematically, but in an ad hoc way, allowing for interference in what he conceived to be special cases. The first qualification proposed in *On Liberty* is concerned with the case of instigative speech. The second qualification considers the case of indecent conduct that is performed in public". As a consequentialist, Mill also acknowledged, that "speech loses its immunity when it constitutes instigation to some harmful action. In his corn-dealer example, Mill asserted that opinions lose their absolute immunity when the circumstances in which they are expressed are such as to constitute by their expression a positive instigation to some mischievous act. Thus, the opinion that corn dealers are starvers of the poor may be prevented from being delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn dealer, or when handed about among the same mob in the form of a placard". But, that same opinion ought to go unmolested when simply circulated through the press. Accordingly, it may be deduced that Mill considered "instigation as a speech that aims to lead mischievous

actions in circumstances which are conducive to the taking of that action. It seems that in instances such as that of the corn dealer, Mill would regard certain speeches as instigation irrespective of whether overt harmful action follows. Though he did not explicitly say this, Mill implied that the intention to lead people to take a harmful action constitutes an instigation. However, advocacy that does not induce someone to take an action, but which is voiced as a matter of ethical conviction, is protected under Mill's theory. This is one of his major contributions to the free speech literature. Mill was the first to distinguish between speech (or discussion) as a matter of ethical conviction and instigation".

By this definition and explanation, nobody is restricted to advocating certain opinions. "Rather, it is the combination of the content of the opinion, its manner, the intentions of the speaker, and the circumstances that necessitate the restriction. In the corn-dealer example, the harmful results of a breach of the peace, disorder, and harm to others are imminent and likely, and therefore they outweigh the importance of free expression. One relates to the factor of intention, the other to manner. As to intention, one may question the relevance of intention to Mill's argument about instigation. One may argue that the relevant consideration is whether circumstances are such that a speech will cause a riot; that would seem sufficient reason for intervention even when the speaker does not intend to cause a riot. I am not convinced. The very usage of the word 'instigation' implies that the intention exists to provoke a riot. I agree that there might be unintended riots. But it seems to me odd to use the term instigation in that context. We have a right to do anything at all with and on our own property, provided only that we do not invade others' property borders. We must not lose sight of this crucial libertarian point. If I own a 100-acres of land, I can prance around naked on it, not because the land is imbued with some "right-to-prance-naked", but because I own the land and it does not (necessarily) violate the property rights of others for me to use my property in this fashion" (Kinsella, 2001). "As for manner; this factor characterizes the way expressions are made, be it an oral or a symbolic speech. We can think of situations in which the manner is not so important, yet the three other factors are sufficient to constitute instigation. Consider, for example, a leader of a fundamentalist religious sect who urges his followers to some mischievous act in a very cool and quiet tone". Elon Musk who promised to make the platform a safe space for political and social discourse.

"Fact-checking is not a perfect response to mis/disinformation and hate speech, but it is one of the few measures used to combat harmful online information" (Riedlinger et al., 2025). The change that was deemed revolutionary had its contrary outlook. For some financial reason, Musk nurtured this idea that those who have money can have more freedom than others by removing official ticks from the celebrity accounts making it difficult for people to recognize the official accounts among a number of fake ones. Now, Musk's idea of equality does not care for equity if one has money. The idea of manner and even incitement is contingent upon the fact that how much money one has to enjoy the subscription. It is very common to see Musk taking over the space in algorithms.

Justice Holmes asserted in a renowned opinion that "we cannot allow falsely shouting 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre. Here too a restriction on speech is justified on the grounds that the content of the speech (that is, its effects, not its intrinsic value), the manner of the speech, and the intentions of the agent are aimed to bring about harm, and the audience is under conditions which diminish its ability to deliberate in a rational manner, and therefore such a shout might lead it to act in a harmful manner (harmful to themselves as well as to others). Hence, to the extent that speech entails an immediate effect, the arguments that assign special status to freedom of speech are less compelling. Boundaries have to be introduced in accordance with the context of the speech, otherwise the results could be too risky. In short, a person does not have a right to freedom of speech; what he does have is the right to hire a hall and address the people who enter the premises. He does not have a right to freedom of the press; what he does have is the right to write or publish a pamphlet, and to sell that pamphlet to those who are willing to buy it (or to give it away to those who are willing to accept it). Thus, what he has in each of these cases is property rights, including the right of free contract and transfer, which form a part of such rights of ownership" (Rothbard, 1998). In addition, social media companies self-regulate through community standards and terms of use requirements. This focuses on material that, while not illegal, may be harmful, including bullying or misleading or indecent content. The government has also published a statutory code of practice it expects social media companies, and other hosting websites, to adhere to. It explains that the code:

"[...] sets out actions that the government believes social media platforms should take to prevent bullying,

insulting, intimidating and humiliating behaviors on their sites. This code of practice does not affect how illegal or unlawful content or conduct is dealt with" (Taylor & Tudor, [2022](#)).

In his magnum opus, entitled *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas stated that the primary function of speech is the coordination of actions of the majority of individuals which allows for a conflict-free society. "Processes of reaching understanding aim at an agreement that meets the conditions of rationally motivated assent to the content of an utterance. A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents. Agreement can indeed be objectively obtained by force, but what comes to pass manifestly through outside influence or the use of violence cannot count subjectively as agreement. Agreement rests on common convictions. The speech act of one person succeeds only if the other accepts the offer contained in it by taking (however implicitly) a yes or no position on a validity claim with his utterance that is in principle criticisable. "This has been manifested in several incidents over the past few years where hate that started in cyberspace resulted in real-life catastrophes. For example:

In 2012, white supremacist Wade Michael Page killed six people at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin after having been active on racist Aryan forums online.

In 2015, Dylann Storm Roof self-radicalized on social media and killed nine African Americans at a church in South Carolina.

Robert Bowers killed 11 elderly worshippers at a synagogue in Pennsylvania. He was active on the Rightist Gab social network, which is a website similar to Twitter used by white supremacists.

Thus, views in cyberspace can transform from virtual hate into real-life violence, hence the necessity for legalization to face bullying, harassment, and credible threats of violence against individuals and institutions" (Tiflati [2023](#)).

The result has too often been arbitrary content deletions and user bans, fueling accusations of political bias: for example, Facebook bans non-violent expressions of white nationalism, in the US the most notable were permanent bans of a number of right-wing activists and conspiracy theorists and provocateurs, including Milo Yiannopoulos. At the

same time, Facebook still allows Hizb-ut-Tahrir, banned in Germany, despite its leaders' advocacy of a global caliphate that would substitute Islamic law for secular democracy" (Fischer, 2018). These validity claims are the fabric of social cohesion as they define the relationship between individuals not because of the circulation of money but through communication. Therefore, the mode of communication, translation of opinions, and freedom of expression must not be weighed with respect to the monetizing ability of the consumers. A person must not own the algorithm on the basis of his ownership of money but the quality of content.

Conclusion

Conclusively, Mill's conclusions with regards to action and speech are considerable in the real world where action endangers the public with immediate consequences, however, speech has an endangering effect with remote and maneuvering consequences in the near or far future. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube, are private platforms with owners and CEOs holding policies for these communication media. Although their owners have the right to control their resources the very right of free speech must not be compromised in any case. The worst these CEOs can do is ban the consumer curbing his freedom of speech, even though consumers interact with one another on these platforms voluntarily but cannot do it exclusively liberated from the control of the owners.

"Even if users do not like their policies, they are free to give negative feedback, but social media companies are free to ignore this feedback. Just because users may enjoy these platforms does not mean that they have a right to have access to them, or force them to operate in a particular way. All these decisions are the prerogative of the resource owners. Even if a specific view might cause harm or risk of harm to others, but the danger is not immediate, then free speech has to be allowed. However, in some circumstances, the time factor might lose its distinctiveness, with the result that the effects of the expression in question are immediate. Indeed, both in the case of instigation as well as in cases of moral offense (say when one vulgarly praises in public the sexual qualities of one's next-door neighbor or one's performances in bed, knowing the anguish that the neighbor might suffer as a result), the effects of the expression are instantaneous and thus might bring about hurtful c

on sequences now, rather than at some remote point in the future. That is, when we discuss the issue of obscene speech or defamation, the line between conduct and speech, according to the criterion of time, becomes blurred and consequently these utterances are not protected under the principle of freedom of speech". Nevertheless, twitter's popularity has declined

over the past two years since Musk took over the platform solely because the political opinionators and celebrities are not to be trusted on their accounts since the symbol of authenticity i.e., the blue ticks have been monetized lessening the equity of these officials with monetary funding.

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