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A Philosophical Examination of Speech and Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to discuss the ways in which contemporary public forums – social media websites – produce the human experience of speech. Throughout the course of this paper, I will establish that speech is an integral part of the human condition, and that it is necessary in what Hannah Arendt once called the political realm. I will then move into a discussion of the relationship between speech and the bodies that typically govern them, featuring in large part the work of utilitarian thinker John Stuart Mill. Subsequently, I will delineate the attitude of the United States government toward free speech, making reference to the United States Constitution, and landmark Supreme Court cases dealing with free speech issues. Finally, I will offer examinations of five online public forums: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Reddit. In doing so, I will explain them in terms of their attitudes toward free speech and self-expression, as well as how those factors combine to produce spaces of appearance that are unique.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

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Section 1

Introduction

Elon Musk is the richest man alive. A businessman, an aspiring comedian, a space guy, a polarizing political figure, and one who asks some of the most pressing questions of the day. Given that he holds many titles – including hundred-billionaire – Musk is a figure on which many have opinions strong and varied. On March 25, 2022, Musk sent a poll to Twitter that went viral. It reads as follows: "Free speech is essential to a functioning democracy. Do you believe Twitter rigorously adheres to this principle?" (Citation) The results of the poll: with 2,035,924 votes, seventy percent of respondents said no, and thirty percent said yes. The comments left on the poll by average individuals and verified famous people alike offered provocative rationale. Thousands of likes were received by those who suggested that Twitter censors views because they belong to the Republican party, and by those who asserted that free speech and democracy are concerns that belong to government only, whereas Twitter is a private company unbound by the same expectations (Citation).

The poll results may or may not be indicative of the true attitude of the world toward Twitter; they may be biased as a result of Elon Musk's follower base and its characteristics. Regardless, in posing this question, Musk raises a number of questions. First, is Twitter a democratic space? Second, does it have an obligation to be? What is free speech, and how has it been conceptualized in the past by philosophers and those charged with protecting it? Does Twitter treat free speech differently than other contemporary public forums?

   The relationship between free speech and the modern public forum is unique and

philosophically interesting. Speech is indeed fundamental to human life, but the philosophers

who established its value would not have been able to anticipate that one day, speech and politics

would take place in the form of infinite and continuous discourse on the internet. This thesis

intends to revisit the innate value of speech in human life, and the theory of speech that has

informed the approach to speech taken by the United States government, which, until the advent

of social media, had the largest influence on the practice of speech. Then, I aim to comparatively

discuss the ways in which certain social media platforms' attitudes toward speech influence the

discourse that they facilitate.

Section 2

Arendt on the Public

Various thinkers in various disciplines have opinions on what it means to live, not to mention to live well. Biologically, one lives when one's heart beats, but the same standard applies for humans and other animals alike, and it says nothing of living a meaningful life as a person. We often ask ourselves where the line is drawn between being alive and living well, which we of course want to know so that we can know whether we have an objective right to be satisfied with who we are. In Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, she notes that for the Romans, being alive was synonymous with being among men, as being dead was to no longer be among men (8). Arendt ascribed deeper than surface-level meaning to this synonymity.

For Arendt, the moment one comes to life as a human is when one engages with the rest of the populace. Arendt argues that since the earliest animal life on earth, one was concerned with one's private affairs. These consisted of only the most basic survival needs: food, water, and shelter. Presently, most species are still exclusively concerned with needs that belong to the private realm; however, humanity has evolved. At a certain point, Arendt notes, humans recognized that they had to work together to better their collective condition. Beyond the private realm, two states of affairs were borne of this recognition: the social and the political (Arendt, and Canovan).

The social realm represents all that is done in the collective interest of expedience: in Arendt's words, that which is "economic" (Arendt, and Canovan 29). In other words, what we do to make our lives more convenient is often social. Early hominids formed social groups by pointing their weapons at outside foes, seeing that it would be more beneficial than having to worry about attacks from the inside of the group. The building and sharing of tools for survival is

also social, in that people are working to better their condition, using what they have to create something more useful. Arendt notes that humans are not the only social animals, and, based on her conception, she is correct. Bees build colonies together; gorillas groom each other. Even so, there must be an element that sets humanity apart from the rest of the animal kingdom, and according to Arendt, that is the political realm (Arendt, and Canovan).

Importantly, the political realm of which she speaks is in terms of the ancient Greeks. This is quite different from how we modernly approach politics; as Arendt puts it, in the modern world, "politics is nothing but a function of society" (33). Meanwhile, what made the Greeks a political people, in Arendt's understanding, was their use of speech. For Arendt, speech is deeply valuable. Through speech, we have disagreements and thoughtful discussions about what is important, and what the right things to do are. The advent of political discussion marks the era in which something can be agreed upon even if it is not the will of the strongest actor in the political body. It is also through speech that we become aware of who we are, and it is through speech that we can define how we would like to be seen by others. In other words, without speech, we would only have physical appearances and skills to demonstrate what kind of human we are. Without speech, then, we would be judged on *what* we are. Speech allows us to be judged based on *who* we are. By telling you, "I am Tom," I am telling you that I am someone. That someone has thoughts, and a history, and only I, Tom, can tell you what those things are that make me who I am, in a political system. And, in a political system, who I am is not dependent upon what I am useful for. This idea – that a person can be defined beyond the sum of the collection of their traits – is the deep value that Arendt says can only be found in the political realm. However, Arendt also worries that encroachment from the social can lead to the death of the political.

This means that if a community would be ruled purely by expedience and instrumentality, without respect to political values, that community would lose its human aspect. A world that casts aside individual expression in the name of a system that flows more smoothly might be an efficient world, but it will find itself lacking human identity. While history teems with examples of societies that sacrifice the political in favor of the social, one of the very best case studies is unfolding before our eyes, as Vladimir Putin's Russia actively seeks the destruction of the political realm.

Putin has been the leader of Russia since 2000. From 2000 to 2008, he was the President, until term limits saw his time in office come to an end. Naturally, after his time in the highest office ended, he retired to the position of Prime Minister, for four years. In that time, the laws for term limits were amended to allow him to come back for two more terms of six years, meaning that theoretically, he should have been leaving the presidency for good in 2024. That would have been the case, if he hadn't also created an amendment giving himself the power to freeze term limits at whim (Isachenkov, and Litvinova). So, essentially, Putin has built a Russian government that functions as a system to serve him and that which gives him the path of least resistance in maintaining power. With elections being neither free nor fair ("Russia"), this is a system of one man's convenience, and presumably also of those who benefit from his being in control. It is not meant to serve the collective interest. Furthermore, the internet in Russia is largely censored to the voices of the outside world, and the media works for the state.

In the context of Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, all of these things serve a valuable purpose to Russia. Theoretically, Russia would benefit from having more land, and Putin himself would enjoy extending his authority. However, the people of Russia – who fund the armed forces – do not have to consent to the invasion in any way. Their elections are rife

with coercion and corruption, such that they can expect great difficulty to come their way if they should oppose Putin and his associated through the ballot. Therefore, we cannot say that they can vote out the war hawks if they want to. Further, with the media made to speak only as the Kremlin dictates, the media that people can consume is only going to tell a biased narrative that supports the war effort. Finally, the lack of freedom to oppose the government on the Russian web (as well as in physical form) is meant to deny the people any space to resist the will of the government.

In this way, the government of Russia has a monopoly on speech within its borders. We would say this is a tragedy in that it is actively leading to harm coming to the people of Ukraine, and to any in Russia who voice support for them. Arendt would go further and say that this is a tragedy because an entire country – geographically the largest on Earth – is without access to the political. For the Russian people to survive, they must submit to the notion that the world and its people are defined exactly as the state says they are. They may make no attempt to define themselves and their surroundings in a new way; they may not speak against the dominating opinion. They lack speech, and access to the political realm. They lack the ability to live full human lives.

Ergo, as Arendt suggests, speech is invariably intertwined with the political realm, and both of these things are invariably intertwined with humanity, in that they set human life apart from that of other animals. Speech is a crucial component of the very experience of being human, and those who do not have it are without true freedom. Therefore, speech is a necessary component of a functional human community. Assuming that that is something for which we should strive, what is the best way to ensure that speech may be protected? What are the responsibilities involved in maximizing speech's role in building a good human world, and to

whom do those responsibilities belong? One philosopher who may have relevant insights is

prominent ethical thinker John Stuart Mill.

Section 3

Mill on Freedom of Speech

In the traditional instance of a public forum, it is operated by a governing body. This is because the forum exists as a means aspiring to an end, that end being the solution to a given societal problem. The people talk about the problem and its potential solutions, and even if they disagree, the discourse gives everyone a greater appreciation for the complexity of the situation at hand. Of course, when the questions of society are left to the public to decide, the government must be democratic. In a democracy, then, the public forum has a real effect, so the government should, ideally, want the forum to be as effective as possible, when it comes to bettering society. What does effectiveness look like for a public forum then, and what rules must the governing overseers follow to reach effectiveness?

Free speech is crucial to the function of a democracy. In a democracy, decisions are supposed to be made by the popular will. Although many governing systems self-characterized as democracies might feature powerful figures at the core of the conception of the popular ideas, ideally, the popular will is generated by the populace. With that said, in any sort of democracy, the people should be the ones who hold the opinions that yield changes in public policy, whether that happens directly, or through changes in the electorate. With all that in mind, for people to come to opinions, discussion must be had among them. True belief is best achieved through the presentation of facts and compelling arguments. Those arguments must be heard, and for that reason, they must have the space to be spoken.

Yet, the primary goal of any system is self-defense, and democracy is no exception. That being the case, there are ideas whose widespread adoption may threaten the stability of a democracy. The most blatant example of this truth is that a people can, theoretically, adopt the

mentality that a democracy is no longer the government that they need. A democracy must be opposed to this idea. One of the most prominent thinkers with a comprehensive ideology about free speech's relationship with democracy is John Stuart Mill.

John Stuart Mill, when thought of, is often thought of as a foundational thinker in the ethical realm of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism posits that the goal of any decision should be the increased happiness of the world. The framework suggests that the ethical quality of an action is dependent upon its outcomes, so all decisions should be made with potential consequences in mind. Utilitarianism has countless critics for compelling reasons, but the reality is that its core premise of decision-making with intended outcomes as focal point is the basis of even more countless decisions made in business and policy to this day.

Being a thinker who so critically examines the possible outcomes of decisions, Mill has extensive thoughts on the value of free speech. Overwhelmingly, he believes that free speech leads to the best outcomes for the world, and should thus be protected. In Mill's 1859 book *On Liberty*, Mill wrote of the moral limitations of a liberal government's ability to limit free speech. One major facet of Mill's philosophy is the harm principle, stating, "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant" (13). Mill's ideology calls for almost absolute freedom for people living in a given society. It operates under the assumption that the state of individuals in society is generally good, and that they should remain pretty much unperturbed, so long as no one is harmed. Of course, the nature of society does not preclude harm, so sometimes, action must be taken, according to Mill, only when it seems likely that one person's actions will cause harm to others. In general, Mill's utilitarianism is centered around the notion that the morally correct actions are those which will

yield the most favorable consequences. The harm principle is right in line, as it argues that a governing body should intervene only to prevent harm.

With that said, the reality is that Mill sees these instances of justified governmental intervention as quite rare. The namesake of this landmark book of his is liberty, which he sees as an individual's protection from an overbearing society. This falls short of absolute freedom, which is an individual's ability to act with no respect the consequences of his or her actions on others. In fact, in issues of speech and debate, Mill's focus is so adamantly supportive of letting arguments go interrupted by the powers at be, that he meticulously outlines the reasons for his thinking. "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion," he says in *On Liberty*, "mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind" (24). In this sentence, "mankind" partially refers to some sovereign agency with the authority to act as mankind, which we can infer would be a government. In another sense, however, mankind can mean the social structure of people that make up society. The social sphere can chill discourse in ways that are different from what a government can do, and Mill believes that interference from either a governmental or social body is typically damaging to a society's best interests.

Mill believes that discourse and disagreement are critical to a democracy's ability to progress. In practice, it never happens that all of humanity agrees on something, no matter how clear the truth is. Some people truly believe that the earth is flat, whereas the vast majority understand it as round. Any given two people can look at the same shirt and see different colors in it. One could even make the case that it is not a shirt at all. Opinions are subjective, and as close as we can get to knowing the truth about something, with as much proof as there could possibly be, there can always be room for someone to form an opposing opinion. It would be too

ambitious for the goal of a discourse to be worldwide harmony on the subject matter, but in a democratic society, there must be enough agreement among the people if something is to be *done* with the opinion; it is difficult to come to that agreement without some level of discussion.

Speaking of any sort of opinion that someone could hold, Mill goes further on the value of putting it into an argumentative setting. Specifically, he notes what is lost when an opinion is silenced by mankind (as defined above). He says, "If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error" (24). In other words, Mill argues here that if an opinion is not put up for debate, regardless of its relationship to the truth, it misses an opportunity. In the scenario where the truth can only be one of two things, if it is a true opinion that is silenced, obviously, that would be bad. It benefits people to know the truth; knowledge is bound to be useful in some capacity, large or small. If the truth is dismissed summarily, people lose the chance to learn something that could be useful, and this is damaging especially in the case of something true and of importance.

Conversely, if a false opinion is denied the opportunity to be tested against what turns out to be true, its holders will miss the opportunity to be enlightened by the facts and the better argument. If denied the opportunity to share their opinion, they will be left with inconclusive knowledge as to why they were wrong, and this sort of dissonance is undesirable. Moreover, the truer opinion would miss the opportunity to prove itself against the lesser, and its holders would have missed the opportunity to go over the reasons why their opinion is superior, and sharpen it in face of a new angle of critique.

Some may say that even when those who boast incorrect opinions are found to be wrong, they generally do not care, and will stick to those ideas. While Mill acknowledges that

stubbornness may cause faulty arguments to persist, he maintains that the argument that this is not a good enough reason to give up on having the debate: "Wrong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument; but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it" (Mill 28-29). In essence, here, he says that it takes a gradual process for incorrect opinions to be corrected. Further, he expresses the belief that facts and good arguments that contradict those opinions must continuously be brought up to erode the lesser beliefs. If the debate were altogether lost, on the grounds that it was finished and that the truth had been spoken and found conclusively, then those who hold the opposite as true would be without the opportunity to gradually find their stance adjusted to the truth.

Mill also argues that silencing speech or a certain opinion would have a chilling effect, one that would damage the discourse in a less direct way. Speaking of the consequences of a government or society discouraging speech, he says, "The greatest harm done is to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped, and their reason cowed, by the fear of heresy" (Mill 47). This means that Mill saw the people's ability to decry an opinion en masse as a dangerously powerful deterrent. If someone were to see others having their opinions shunned, they would also see the espousers of those opinions rejected. New opinions are invariably going to contradict someone else's thinking (otherwise, they would not be new), and, thinking in terms of large issues that matter to the public good, new opinions can be reasonably expected to defy the status quo. If sharing an opinion in public creates the risk of being cast out as someone who is wrong and whose thoughts are so far outside of the acceptable school of thought that they should be forbidden words, then those with unheard opinions will be discouraged from sharing on the public forum. They will be encouraged not to test their

arguments against the common thought, for fear that the risks in doing so outweigh the potential benefits.

This stance by Mill seems plausible enough, and it would surely lead to the suppression of innovation. This, of course, would be counterintuitive to what a society's goals should be. As new ideas go, it seems implausible that what originates from one person, even if mostly true, could not stand to be improved upon in the face of someone else's perspective. Therefore, people should not be discouraged from sharing their opinions, even if they are not wholly true – even if they are actually wholly false. The public benefits from the smallest emergence of truth, so the public cannot afford people to be afraid that they will be rejected and silenced when they share a new opinion.

Mill also expresses the belief that is hard to see anyone as qualified to decide what should and should not be spoken in a given society. The argument rests on the fact that no one is infallible and, to that end, Mill is correct. Not one person can be the authority on what is true, because no one person alive knows the truth about everything. Even though we often operate on assumptions of certain truths, the reality is that it is very difficult for one to say he knows the absolute truth about anything. If no one knows the truth about everything, how can any person be qualified to decide what is and is not the truth? That, according to Mill, is too tall an order for one person to fill, and a problem solved by opting to avoid censoring speech at all costs.

Clearly, John Stuart Mill sought to make the case that free speech should not be interfered with by a government or a social system. Overwhelmingly, he believed that it would do more harm than good to censor speech; the public discourse was the surest way to get to the truth, and the truth was vital for the continuation of the society. Mill's ideas about utilitarianism linger even today, and whereas his writing did not precede the formulation of the United States

government, the two are comparable in terms of the way they approach the government's

obligations with respect to moderating speech.

Section 4

The United States Government and Free Speech

In theory, the United States government has been a caretaker of free speech since 1791, with the ratification of the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights was an enumeration of those things which the government was not supposed to take away from the people. The First Amendment – the first legal protection offered by the Bill of Rights – states the following: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" (*The Constitution of the United States*, Amendment 1). Let us consider the implications of this statement in depth.

Congress is the governmental entity of the United States whose primary responsibility is to make the laws that govern its people. Therefore, based on the text of this law, the United States cannot make laws that concern religion, or prevent people in the country from participating in religion of any sort.[1] Next, and more notably, the United States cannot curtail the ability of the people to speak freely, to have press, to gather in groups peacefully, or to let the government know that they are unhappy with the present state of affairs. These protections are designed to ensure that the people have certain rights that may not be taken from them under any circumstances. Those final four guarantees are essential to the protection of what Hannah Arendt defined as the political realm.

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[1] Later judicial decisions would deem that First Amendment Protections shielded the American people from infringements on these rights, in accordance with the Fourteenth Amendment, which states that citizens may not be "deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law" by states.

As was mentioned in Section II, the political is what separates the human from the rest of the animal kingdom. When people have the ability to speak, they have the opportunity to engage meaningfully with the rest of the world. They have the opportunity to discuss the affairs of the present, to talk about the ways that their world could be improved, to point out issues with the status quo, or to speak in defense of the world or the status quo. These elements are critical for a functional democracy. The people also have the opportunity to define themselves, to share their stories, and to speak to their own experiences. These elements are important in the interest of the people's humanity. Both for the system and for those living within it, these guarantees of protection are integral to success.

Moreover, freedom of the press, and to assemble and even protest, reflect the same values as the protection of free speech, such that they can be seen as enumerated protections of speech. Independent press affords people the opportunity to recount events that they deem relevant, and discuss why they are important and whether they are good or bad. In this way, the speech of the press is inherently political; another way to view the press is the way that people question and comment on the way that things are, in public. Without the press – or with only a press restricted to certain perspectives – the people's ability to participate politically is limited. Furthermore, regarding the protection of assembly, one of the easiest ways to stifle political engagement and potentially undesirable (from the perspective of the government) opinions is to prevent them from spreading. Without the ability of people to assemble in groups, they cannot have collective discourse that would help them to round out their ideas. Without free discourse, there certainly is no free speech. Finally, then without the ability to peacefully address grievances with the government, all other political participation is far less meaningful. If the people may be denied the ability to tell the government what they could do better, the government has more leeway to

neglect the will of the people. They may attempt to influence the state of affairs with elections, but even those are infrequent: at the national level, the most frequent elections occur just once per two years. Theoretically, then, the government could ignore the people's will for the better part of a two-year Congressional term in the absence of the guarantee of protest. Given the extent to which life could change over the course of two years, life without protest would mean, at least, a severe impingement on the people's control over their own lives. This strike against a category of speech, like the others prohibited in the First Amendment, would be a detriment to not only the function of the democracy, but also to the human condition.

With all that being said, these protections of free speech have been specified and narrowed over time, partially to draw lines to prevent speech that is harmful to society (and partially to establish the scope of what makes something speech). The way these definitions are narrowed is through decisions made by the Supreme Court of the United States. Through its interpretation of the foundational laws written in the Constitution, the Supreme Court is often charged with deciding whether federal, state, and local laws are in step with what that Constitution allows. Although the appointment of Supreme Court Justices has recently become a point of partisan conflict, the judiciary is meant to be the branch of the federal government that is separate from partisan politics. It is meant to be immovable by the will of the masses, and it is meant to make objective interpretations of the Constitution. Throughout the course of history, many questions brought to the Supreme Court have had room for subjective judgment of the meaning of the Constitution, but, at least in theory, the Supreme Court is meant to be the most objective of the branches of government in the United States.

One Supreme Court judgment that had significant implications for the future of the interpretation of the First Amendment was a 1942 decision on the case of *Chaplinsky v. New*

Hampshire. The appellant, Walter Chaplinsky, was a Jehovah's witness whose repeated attempts to push his religious beliefs in his community stoked its ire. A mob closed in on him, the police were called, and it was he who was arrested. Upset with the officer who pulled him away from the scene, Chaplinsky called him a "God-damned racketeer" and a "damned fascist" ("Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire"). Chaplinsky was then charged for offensive language directed at the officer under New Hampshire law, and the question was raised whether the statute was acceptable under the purview of the Constitution, given that it may have abridged free speech.

Ultimately, the Court used this to define a category of unprotected speech. The Supreme Court found that a spoken phrase's being offensive is not grounds for its being banned, and the First Amendment was meant to protect this very type of speech. However, what the Constitution does not protect includes "fighting words": those whose "very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of peace" ("Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire"). So, per that 1942 decision, the Constitution is read as unprotective of words that constitute injury or are likely to cause violence.

Support for this decision came about twenty-seven years later, in the Supreme Court's ruling on *Brandenburg v. Ohio*. Brandenburg, a Ku Klux Klansman, made an incendiary speech about the government and the civil rights movement, in which he stated that there "may need to be some revengeance taken" against the government ("Brandenburg v. Ohio"). Subsequently, he was convicted under an Ohio statute that outlawed the advocacy of "crime, sabotage, violence, or unlawful methods of terrorism as a means of accomplishing industrial or political reform" ("Brandenburg v. Ohio"). Whereas it may seem apparent that these things – crime, violence, unlawful terrorism – are inherently oppositional to the function of the state, and therefore criminal, the question at hand is whether condoning them is likewise criminal. The Supreme

Court decided that the answer to this question was no, but even so, it developed a standard for a specific form of unprotected speech: incitement. The Court defined incitement as speech "directed at inciting or producing imminent lawless action" and "likely to incite or produce such action" ("Brandenburg v. Ohio") So, for something to be incitement, not only must it be likely to lead to criminal action, it also must be intentional. This strong definition of incitement makes it practically quite hard to punish by law, given the difficulty in *proving* that someone intends to incite lawless actions with their words. All this goes to say that the United States government has shown consistent reluctance to limit speech in any capacity.

Beyond fighting words and incitement, one important category of speech that warrants mentioning is fraud. The United States does not aim to protect fraudulent speech via the First and Fourteenth Amendments. In order to cite someone for being fraudulent, however, law enforcement must be proven that that individual has gained from his or her misleading statements, or that another party is damaged as part of them. In 2012, the case of a man named Xavier Alvarez was brought to the Supreme Court. He had, in 2007, claimed in public that he was a retired United States Marine once awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. This was a lie. Alvarez was cited for a violation of the Stolen Valor Act, a national statute that prohibits fraudulent claims to military honor. The Supreme Court, tasked with determining the constitutional validity of the Stolen Valor Act, found that it was not constitutional, and therefore, that the man's speech was protected. He had not materially gained from it, nor was there evidence that his actions degraded the value of what he claimed to have achieved. From this, we can see that, as far as the law is concerned, speech can be verifiably false and misleading, and still enjoy the protection of the United States government ("Xavier v. Alvarez").

The United States does have a few other noteworthy categories of unprotected speech. Among them is defamation, which warrants a mention because, like fraud, it falls under the larger umbrella of deception. Even though there are instances of verifiable truth and falsehood, the United States will protect either, excepting only when falsehoods yield undesirable consequences: misplaced gain and harm. This is indicative of the overall commitment that the United States holds in favor of speech, which is clearly reflective of the ideals put forth by John Stuart Mill. With emphases on the results of speech – whether it is likely to cause unwanted harm, namely – the United States' framework is utilitarian in nature, and demonstrates reservation to take anything from the ability of the people to speak. The overarching governmental philosophy is consistent with Mill, and implicitly beneficial to the political realm that Arendt describes.

With speech being a point of distinction for humankind according to Hannah Arendt, the United States and its Supreme Court have the vital responsibility of setting the parameters of what it means to be a human in the United States. It seems fair to say that the United States has historically held the conviction that speech should be exchanged freely among the people, without the fear that a powerful government can silence them for putting forth a particular set of views. For Arendt, this conviction is important, in that it allows people to maintain their unique identities and have control over their lives as humans. Over time, the Supreme Court has taken the position that sometimes it is in the interest of public safety not to protect certain types of speech: those that cause harm in the world. In terms of Arendt's philosophy, this might be an example of an instance of the social and the political needs of the people clashing, and the social being prioritized. This is not an inherently bad thing, and, in fact, in the context of utilitarianism, the consideration of the good of the world is everything. So, the United States government is

responsible for setting the outer boundaries of speech that it and its state governments may not

cross by limiting.

Section 5

Social Media and the New Political Realms

The United States government takes the position that speech should be a given right, with very few exceptions. However, there is no Constitutional prevention that could force privately owned companies to protect speech to the same extent. On that note, something that the likes of the founding fathers and John Stuart Mill had no blueprint for was the advent of the internet. Ever-expanding and lacking singular ownership, the internet has revolutionized everything about the way that humans engage with one another. People from different occupations, ages, economic backgrounds, physical places, and social statuses are nowadays afforded the opportunity to interact with one another unlike before; at the least, the vast majority of American people must use the internet for some major facet of their lives. In fact, the internet dominates so much of modern life that it also encompasses the most frequently used public forums of the day.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, and LinkedIn are similar spaces in which people are inclined to subscribe to news about their interests, which may include people as well as organizations and things. Broadly speaking, these are websites and applications that people can use to keep up with people and trends, as well as display themselves as they would like to be seen. Today, these are major channels that people – especially in the United States – use to participate in the political realm. These forums are vital for communication, and while it would be fair to say that increasing amounts of political engagement are happening on social media today, it is crucial to understand that each of these five communities is incredibly different in the way it is constructed. Subsequently, people in the modern age are coming to experience themselves in different ways through different forms of speech, on platforms where different

forms of speech are more normal than others. In order to investigate what all of this means, let us turn to Facebook, the most versatile of the social media we know.

Sub-Section 1: Facebook

Facebook used to be not only the name of a popular social media platform, but also of the conglomerate that oversaw other noteworthy sites, including Instagram. Now, however, Facebook's parent company has been rebranded as Meta, which has goals that transcend social media dominance. Facebook itself remains a social media platform with a diverse set of features. On Facebook, one can post pictures, post personal and professional updates, pose questions, buy and sell goods, share businesses and ideas, send and receive private messages, join and start groups with people of like interests and traits, share live videos, share exterior media, plan events, learn news, and do even more. What began as a forum for sharing statuses and keeping up with loved ones became a revolution in human interaction and has become a staple in the contemporary political realm. Like other forums seen throughout the course of history, Facebook has taken to some level of moderation of what is said and done on its site. Its community standards are detailed, and each standard has a nuanced "Policy Rationale." It largely carries undertones of respect for the complex nature of speech and although it explains them in a digestible way, it does not sacrifice nuance for easy comprehension ("Facebook Community Standards").

The words found on the Facebook Community Standards are as follows: "We're committed to making Facebook a safe place. We remove content that could contribute to a risk of harm to the physical security of persons. Content that threatens people has the potential to

intimidate, exclude or silence others and isn't allowed on Facebook." Immediately, it seems that Facebook's philosophy is comparable to the approach taken by the United States government: it is based on harm, and the consequences of certain types of speech. With that said, although it similarly concerns itself with harm, it extends beyond the boundaries of the protections afforded to speech by the Constitution. Whereas violent speech generally has to be *likely* to produce harm for the government not to protect it, Facebook here explains that it will remove content that *could* contribute to the *risk* that someone is harmed. The threshold of harm that warrants the restriction of speech is therefore slightly lower on Facebook than it is for the United States legal system. Meanwhile, Facebook also notes that speech that has the potential to "silence others" is also not allowed on its servers ("Facebook Community Standards") … meaning that it will be silenced. While some might consider this ironic, others might see it as the recognition of Mill's lesser-known conviction about free speech, which is that it can be silenced socially. Perhaps Facebook is privy to this concern, and here takes a step to lessen that risk, at the expense of the speech of those who may seek to take it upon themselves to be silencers.

Further, Facebook offers a definition, where legally there is not one in the United States, of hate speech. "We believe that people use their voice and connect more freely when they don't feel attacked on the basis of who they are. That is why we don't allow hate speech on Facebook. It creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion, and in some cases may promote offline violence. We define hate speech as a direct attack against people — rather than concepts or institutions— on the basis of what we call protected characteristics: race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, religious affiliation, caste, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity and serious disease" ("Hate Speech"). Facebook here demonstrates a willingness to protect people from direct verbal attacks in efforts to keep its environment free of intimidation, and inclusive, so that

a diverse array of people from the above categories can feel comfortable contributing to it. So, if Person A speaks to Person B on Facebook in a hostile way based on one of those protected characteristics in Person B, Person A's speech will not be tolerated in Facebook.

Another important characteristic of the governance of a public forum, as was mentioned previously, is how exactly it handles misinformation. On Facebook, misinformation is taken quite seriously. Its policy on the matter is as follows: "We remove misinformation where it is likely to directly contribute to the risk of imminent physical harm. We also remove content that is likely to directly contribute to interference with the functioning of political processes and certain highly deceptive manipulated media. In determining what constitutes misinformation in these categories, we partner with independent experts who possess knowledge and expertise to assess the truth of the content and whether it is likely to directly contribute to the risk of imminent harm. This includes, for instance, partnering with human rights organizations with a presence on the ground in a country to determine the truth of a rumor about civil conflict, and partnering with health organizations during the global COVID-19 pandemic" ("Misinformation).

Immediately, we can see that once again, Facebook's first consideration is whether speech in this category creates harm. This is interesting in the case of misinformation because falsehood is scalar; many false statements contain shreds of what is true, whereas some things are blatantly false. While the spectrum of truth may be a relevant factor in determining some misinformation's level of harm, it must be a means to an end at best. What is also noteworthy is that Facebook claims to outsource the responsibility of fact-checking. One of John Stuart Mill's major tenants in defense of limited governmental space to censor speech is the question of who gets to decide whether something is true or false. Why, he asked, should a government have the final say in what is said, given that it is a stakeholder in virtually all that occurs in the political

space? Facebook, presents itself as privy to this concern, and passed the responsibility to independent actors, who would theoretically hold less stake in the consequences of what is true. In this light, Facebook also attempts to distance its own opinions, whatever they may be, from the discourse on given topics. Consistent with this position we find the words of Facebook's parent company, Meta: "Meta wants people to be able to talk openly about the issues that matter to them, even if some may disagree or find them objectionable" ("Facebook Community Standards"). Thus, the personality we can parse from Facebook's Community Standards is a cautious feeling toward limiting speech, deviating only slightly from the Constitution, in terms of defining hate speech.

The final major component of the attitude toward speech that may influence its users' participation is the way Facebook sees authenticity in those same Community Standards. This might be the most direct influence on how Facebook generates Arendtian political participation. In Facebook's words, "We want to make sure the content people see on Facebook is authentic. We believe that authenticity creates a better environment for sharing, and that's why we don't want people using Facebook to misrepresent who they are or what they're doing" (Facebook Community Standards"). For this reason, Facebook requires its users to be, as far as can be seen, *who they are*. This means, on the surface, that those who create profiles on Facebook are expected not to impersonate others; they make accounts with their own names. They can be linked to what they're doing through their own posts, and also through what others post and link them to. Below the surface, all of this may very well put pressure on the individual. The notion that one must be who one *is* creates an implication that a person must be of a very particular type. In this way, an individual might theoretically be put in a position to have to choose who to be and how to present themself in a way that is consistent with the version of themselves that

they have created. Compound this with an algorithm, such as Facebook's, which suggests to the

user new content that aligns with that persona, people may find themselves leaning further into

the personalities they've cultivated without realizing that they are doing so. While it could be

said that this allows people to grow more as who they are, but that would be premised by the idea

that who they are is of one way.

How can we be sure of what people are doing on Facebook? The best way to make an

educated guess is to take a look at the most followed pages on Facebook. When one follows a

page on Facebook, one can expect to see content from that entity while perusing one's "feed" –

that is, one's default screen of personalized news. That person's feed will also include personal

updates and shared posts from friends, and it may even be predominantly comprised of such

things. Still, these most followed pages are a look into what the largest number of people are

interested in. The following are Facebook's most followed public pages:

Table 1: Most Followed Facebook Pages

Rank	Page Name	Millions of Followers	Description
1	Facebook App	176	Social Media
2	Samsung	161	Product/Corporation
3	Cristiano Ronaldo	151	Footballer
4	Mr. Bean	129	Fictional Character
5	CGTN	117	State Media
6	5-Minute Crafts	117	Internet Media
7	Shakira	114	Musician
8	Real Madrid C.F.	112	Football Club

| 9 | Will Smith | 111 | Actor |
| 10 | Coca-Cola | 110 | Product/Corporation |

("List Of Most-Followed Facebook Pages")

This list is a diverse data set that only serves to indicate that there is no one category of interest that dominates the happenings on Facebook. The list includes corporations, media, athletics, public figures, a fictional character, a craft-sharing page, and Facebook itself. While the similarity between all of these is clearly popularity, there is otherwise nothing conclusive that would tell us that most Facebook users experience this space of appearance in a uniform way. Rather, we might be able to say that the conclusion to be drawn here is that Facebook, as a political space, is used in many ways. Perhaps other websites will demonstrate narrower participation in the political.

Sub-Section 2: Instagram

With that in mind, let us move to consider the kind of personality that comes about on a comparable platform: Instagram. Also, owned by Meta, Instagram began as a platform exclusively for the sharing of photographs. As one might expect, Instagram has similar standards to Facebook, although they are not entirely the same. Whereas Facebook's policies read as if to explain the complexity of speech and discourse to the rational observer, Instagram's policies reflect simplicity and emphasize the importance of expression. The earliest detectable deviation from Facebook's style comes from the fact that whereas Facebook's rules are labeled as "Community Standards", Instagram's are labeled as "Community Guidelines" ("Community

Guidelines"). This is the first indication that whereas Facebook intends to create itself as a space for discussion – but one with ground rules – Instagram's space of appearance is meant to be more of a creative space unburdened by expectations.

While Instagram's guidelines link out to definitions and specifics found in the Facebook Community Standards, Instagram's own guidelines are set up with two sections, casually labeled "The Short" and "The Long". The Short is a simple summary of what Instagram's goals are and what one really shouldn't use it for, but in The Long, there is obviously more insight as to what is summarized therein. In The Long, the safety guidelines are pretty much the same as those on Facebook, with similar boundaries prohibiting threats and detailing the need for respect. However, whereas Facebook delineates its position based on a philosophy and a vision for what it believes creates the best discourse, Instagram, instead, makes a moral argument to the user, with such phrases as, "It's never OK to encourage violence or attack anyone based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, disabilities, or diseases" ("Community Guidelines").

Compare that to Facebook's statement on the same subject matter: "We don't allow hate speech on Facebook… We define hate speech as a direct attack against people — rather than concepts or institutions— on the basis of what we call protected characteristics: race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, religious affiliation, caste, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity and serious disease" ("Facebook Community Standards"). Whereas Facebook leads its discussions with "Policy Rationales", Instagram leads its with an expression of what is not "OK." As we will see, this divergence is indicative of the fact that overall, Instagram views itself as an individualistic space, whereas Facebook sees itself as a community set up for interaction.

Of course, the mitigation of misinformation is also an important topic to a public forum, and Instagram is no exception. Yet, it actually lacks its own statement regarding misinformation in general. It offers a disclaimer regarding misinformation as it pertains to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, which includes the following: "We're working to remove content that has the potential to contribute to real-world harm, including through our policies prohibiting coordination of harm, sale of medical masks and related goods, hate speech, bullying and harassment and misinformation that contributes to the risk of imminent violence or physical harm" ("Community Guidelines"). In this note, Instagram does address misinformation; again, the company is concerned only with misinformation that contributes to the risk of harm, as it mentions twice. While we might be able to infer that Instagram has a stance on misinformation in general from this, what's also clear by the lack of an overall policy being present in The Long is that Instagram does not see misinformation as a top priority. This suggests that it does not see itself as a platform for discourse in the way that Facebook does.

The final major component to the policy that might define interactions on the site is its position on authenticity. From the Community Guidelines: "You don't have to use your real name on Instagram, but we do require Instagram users to provide us with accurate and up to date information. Don't impersonate others and don't create accounts for the purpose of violating our guidelines or misleading others." In theory, this is hardly different from Facebook. Facebook makes it clear that it holds authenticity as integral to discourse. However, a major difference is present here in that Instagram does not require one to use one's own name. While many Instagram users do anyway – myself included – this aspect of Instagram marks a major separation, in that it gives users the option to literally describe themselves as they want to be described, rather than by the name they have by default. On Facebook, I am Tom Lichtel. On

Instagram, I can be @tomlichtel, or @tommy_lovesguitar or @soccerfan204 or

@someguynamed.tom. On Facebook, I can list my interests, but people need not know anything

but my name before they interact with me there. On Instagram, I can tell the world how I want to

be perceived through my username, which I can also change over time. In lacking the norm of

using my full name and coming as one presently *is*, Instagram encourages its users further to

participate as they would like to be seen. This difference marks a crucial distinction, in terms of

Arendt's conception of the political.

If this difference seems trivial, consider the emergence of the "finsta". In the words of the

New York Times, "'Finsta,' a slang term, is widely accepted as a contraction of 'fake' and

'Insta' (short for Instagram). It is neither an official designation nor a type of account offered by

Facebook. Rather, it is a term many users ascribe to secondary accounts they create for

themselves on Instagram, where their identities — and, often, the content of their posts — are

obscured to all but a small, carefully chosen group of followers" (Weaver, and Issawi). In other

words, the finsta is a type of secondary Instagram account for users. Whereas Instagram may

often be associated with garnering likes by posting interesting content of oneself, for some, that

is a process that may cause stress and apprehension. However, Instagram offers the ability for

users to establish multiple accounts with the same email address – meaning one person can take

on two or more different personalities. This is also distinct from Facebook, where one email

address equates to one person, and one cannot be more than one person on Facebook. The finsta

is far from fake – it is generally a private account that a user will keep to a small circle, and will

not use the person's full name. As a result of these characteristics, the user may feel more

comfortable posting everyday content without worrying about impressing the rest of the internet,

or the scrutiny of parents or future employers. In fact, it will even be less likely to show up in a

search engine when someone is searched by name, because it does not tend to include the person's full name. So, a person with a finsta can invite others to follow it and then only accept those follow requests that that person feels comfortable seeing themselves in a different, more relaxed personality. The finsta represents cognizant control of one's appearance in the political; one may easily have an account to post one's best moments and best photos, and another to post one's other moments in photos, and experiment with creating their own identities.

Thus, Instagram creates a space of appearance that is quite different from Facebook. Even so, these are two of the more similar mainstream social media platforms. But let us also ponder the uses of Instagram by its users, once again by searching the list of most followed pages for a common denominator. According to Wikipedia – which continuously updates its website with respect to this content – the following are the ten most followed accounts on the platform:

Table 2: Most Followed Instagram Pages

Rank	Username	Owner	Millions of Followers	Profession
1	@instagram	Instagram	488	Social media
2	@cristiano	Cristiano Ronaldo	421	Footballer
3	@kyliejenner	Kylie Jenner	324	TV personality, model, businesswoman
4	@leomessi	Lionel Messi	316	Footballer
5	@selenagomez	Selena Gomez	309	Musician, actress, singer, producer

6	@therock	Dwayne Johnson	307	Actor, wrestler
7	@arianagrande	Ariana Grande	303	Musician, actress
8	@kimkardashian	Kim Kardashian	297	TV personality, model, businesswoman
9	@beyonce	Beyoncé	247	Musician, actress
10	@khloekardashian	Khloe Kardashian	231	TV personality, model

("List Of Most-Followed Instagram Accounts")

This list looks different from what we examined with Facebook. For one, there is a common theme in this list in terms of nationality: only two of these ten accounts originate outside of the United States. Perhaps more relevant to our topic at hand, however, is that, apart from Instagram itself, each of these most followed accounts is an *individual*. In this way, Instagram is distinct from Facebook. It falls in line with the larger picture painted by the rules and attitudes that Instagram puts forth: Instagram is a place where people can come to experiment with identity, and here, we can see that that is something done individually. With individuals being the most successful Instagram users, it is clear that on Instagram, the political is experienced as a sphere of individuals interacting with one another. In terms of Arendt's political realm, this means that Instagram is a site for individual self-presentation, and the overall picture indicates that Instagram is more this way than Facebook. Instagram constructs a space of appearance that focuses on the person.

Sub-Section 3: Twitter

Twitter presents its mission as follows: "Twitter's purpose is to serve the public conversation. Violence, harassment and other similar types of behavior discourage people from expressing themselves, and ultimately diminish the value of global public conversation. Our rules are to ensure all people can participate in the public conversation freely and safely" ("The Twitter Rules"). Immediately, this is reminiscent of Facebook's principles, in that it views itself as a facilitator, and rationalizes its decision-making in the interest of keeping the discourse healthy. On Twitter, everyone is primarily a conversationalist. While one can be a conversationalist on Facebook and Instagram alike, conversation is the primary function of Twitter. Twitter has memes, and it allows for sharing pictures – but only up to four pictures at a time. It also does not have the groups nor opportunities to define oneself with an exhaustive public biography like Facebook.

So, discourse being the function of Twitter, it must have a stance on the limitations of free speech. Twitter has a set of rules, set up in short, digestible summary sentences that link out to separate pages with in-depth explanations. Regarding safety and abuse, Twitter offers this policy summary: "You may not engage in the targeted harassment of someone, or incite other people to do so. This includes wishing or hoping that someone experiences physical harm" ("The Twitter Rules"). In other words, speaking violently about someone or toward someone would not be acceptable behavior on Twitter. Another relevant component of the Twitter safety rules is as follows: "We have a zero tolerance policy against violent threats. Those deemed to be sharing violent threats will face immediate and permanent suspension of their account" ("How Twitter Handles Abusive Behavior"). Clearly, people who engage in behavior that might constitute a violent threat will have their ability to participate in Twitter taken away. This standard marks a

significant deviation from what Facebook's standards are; Facebook takes a nuanced policy

toward threats. It is not that Facebook could be said to welcome threatening behavior, but at least

it seems to have less intolerance for it. Facebook will, according to its standards, not tolerate

"threats of high-severity violence" and has a process for determining whether threats are

"credible" ("Violence and Incitement"). Twitter, on the other hand, with a categorial ban on

threats, demonstrates that it protects free speech just a bit less.

Twitter does, however, take a similar stance to Facebook with respect to hate speech:

"You may not promote violence against, threaten, or harass other people on the basis of race,

ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation,

age, disability, or serious disease" ("The Twitter Rules").

Twitter also takes a less nuanced approach to misinformation than Facebook, it seems.

According to the Twitter rules, "You may not deceptively share synthetic or manipulated media

that are likely to cause harm. In addition, we may label Tweets containing synthetic and

manipulated media to help people understand their authenticity and to provide additional

context" ("The Twitter Rules"). Twitter also offers clarification on what it deems to be

misleading media: "it must:

- Include media that is significantly and deceptively altered, manipulated, or fabricated, or

- Include media that is shared in a deceptive manner or with false context, and

- Include media likely to result in widespread confusion on public issues, impact public

    safety, or cause serious harm" ("Our Synthetic and Manipulated Media Policy").

This policy reflects a significant divergence from the standards of the United States

government and of Mill, even if the commitments demonstrated on this public forum appear not

to be all that different from those.

After all, Twitter considers it to be a violation of its ideals for altered media to be shared. So, if something is shared on Twitter that seems blatantly "fabricated" after further scrutiny, Twitter, the site will take action against the post or the account that posted it. It could come in the form of, at best, a label on the Tweet that indicates that it is misleading, or, at worst, a suspension of the account. Furthermore, if the media shared on Twitter has a false context or is shared deceptively, and it will cause "widespread confusion on public issues", that too constitutes a violation of the rules. While confusion is typically not a good thing, the use of the term in this context is revealing; we will not see confusion cited in the legal system as an overarching factor contributing to the limitation of speech. In raising the issue of confusion about public issues, it is possible that confusion is an inherent harm, so in the context of Mill, it may not be out of place to say that confusion is something antithetical to the good of the world. However, the presence of confusion typically implies that there is an existent truth that is being obscured. Hence, we can infer that Twitter views deception leading to large-scale obstruction of the truth as an inherent harm. If this is the case, Twitter takes a position that, so far, is unique with respect to Facebook, Instagram, and the United States government: lying is not protected on Twitter, and it is viewed as a harm in its own right because a large number of people having limited access to objective truth is harm in its own right. Maybe this is a philosophy not omitted in the definitions of harm found in Facebook or Instagram, but its explicit statement here represents Twitter's stronger commitment to truth and weaker commitment to free speech than what Facebook offers.

In this way, surely Twitter can be said to operate differently as a public forum than Facebook and Instagram. Still, one more tenant of speech that can be reviewed with respect to the rules of Twitter is its stance on self-representation. The Twitter rules state, "You may not

impersonate individuals, groups, or organizations to mislead, confuse, or deceive others, nor use

a fake identity in a manner that disrupts the experience of others on Twitter." In other words,

Twitter users are not allowed to misrepresent themselves if doing so comes as a source of

confusion or deception for others. Otherwise, however, Twitter users have freedom in how they

might choose to represent themselves. Like Instagram, Twitter does not require that users display

their real names. This is not explicitly stated, however, in the Twitter rules, so that may be a

point of divergence between the ways that users perceive the two sites.

Another interesting note about Twitter with respect to self-representation is the restriction

to Tweets as the mode of communication. While people can indeed share short videos and photos

on Twitter, Tweets are the main platform for discourse. Tweets, however, are limited to 280

characters apiece and may not be edited once they are posted. This encourages users to be

specific and accurate with the messages that they send out. It may yield a discourse that is

subsequently quicker, and more direct. It also might encourage users to be more quoteworthy and

quippy with their messages, knowing that they must be brief with what they say, and with the

confidence required to post something publicly that cannot be revised later. This whole process

might systematically discourage saying things that are objectively less worth saying. In this way,

the political experience of Twitter is one of strong voices, and one that may involve more

thoughtful discourse.

How do people use Twitter? Once again, Wikipedia maintains the list that best helps us

understand:

Table 3: Most Followed Twitter Pages

Rank	Account Name	Owner	Millions of Followers	Occupation

1	@BarackObama	Barack Obama	131.3	Former U.S. President
2	@justinbieber	Justin Bieber	114.3	Musician
3	@katyperry	Katy Perry	108.8	Musician
4	@rihanna	Rihanna	105.8	Musician
5	@cristiano	Cristiano Ronaldo	98.6	Footballer
6	@taylorswift13	Taylor Swift	90.4	Musician
--	@realDonaldTrump	Donald Trump	88.8	Former U.S. President, businessman
--	@ArianaGrande	Ariana Grande	85.3	Musician, actress
7	@ladygaga	Lady Gaga	84.4	Musician, actress
8	@elonmusk	Elon Musk	80.0	Engineer, businessman
9	@TheEllenShow	Ellen DeGeneres	77.5	TV personality
10	@narendramodi	Narendra Modi	77.5	Prime Minister of India

("List of Most-Followed Twitter Accounts")

Like what appears on Instagram, we once again have a list of individuals in front of us.

Interestingly, Twitter opts to omit inactive accounts from their rankings, but perhaps more

interesting is the fact that two of the most followed accounts on Twitter – the would-be seventh

and eighth most followed, respectively – belong to accounts that are inactive. One of those

accounts – former United States President Donald Trump – is permanently suspended from the

platform on account of violating the safety policies we examined earlier. In any case, we have in

front of us the twelve most followed Instagram accounts, all of which belong to individuals.

However, whereas Instagram's most followed individuals were exclusively entertainers in the

arts and in sport, this list shows political leaders as well, including a major voice in each

mainstream United States political party, the Prime Minister of India, and Elon Musk, who is,

among other things, known for his political commentary. In fact, the most followed account

belongs to former President Barack Obama. The political realm in which these leaders operate,

however, is in the modern conception of politics; these are present or former leaders of the

world.

What we can deduce from this list is that Twitter is unique from Facebook in that it

shows a prioritization of the individual voice. It is like Instagram in that way. However, unlike

Instagram, the individuals we see on this list are not all in entertainment. Rather, the perspectives

that flourish on Twitter are those entertainers *and* those who are professional politicians, whose

very trade it is to speak and act in what they see as the best interest of hundreds of billions of

others. This might reflect that Twitter as a whole is a space of individuality, but also one in

which the individual seeks to engage more in the discourse of public affairs.

The fact of the matter remains that whereas there are important differences between the

platforms that shape user participation in what Hannah Arendt described as the political realm,

these are three similar platforms. On all three, it is normal for users to be themselves and to share

personal experiences and thoughts. There are various pressures at play in each of the three that

shape a user's self-portrayal, and that ultimately must have effects on the ways in which users

then view themselves; when one sees one's everyday experiences in accordance with the way a

given social media following will interpret them, one's everyday experience changes too. Still,

there are social media platforms that would not be found in the same category as these, but nonetheless constitute public forums. One such platform is LinkedIn.

Sub-Section 4: LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a website whose primary purpose is to match people with jobs. In this way, LinkedIn is a more pragmatic forum than Instagram and Facebook, even if still it is a forum. LinkedIn characterizes itself as follows: "The mission of LinkedIn is simple: connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). LinkedIn, therefore, is a place where the prerequisite is being a member of the professional world. In theory, this description would include the majority of the world's people, but this would still be a significantly smaller population than that from which the aforementioned platforms draw. Further, LinkedIn is distinct from those networks in that it is a means to a well-defined end: making people "more productive and successful" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). LinkedIn is a platform with a well-defined vision for the way in which it would like to influence its users.

LinkedIn offers many of the same features as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Users can share photos and follow things they are interested in. They can privately message one another, and add likes and comments to the media that others post. Like on Facebook, users can build exhaustive profiles that detail exactly who they are. They can also keep up with current events and join groups. Users can write posts about themselves and share emotions and opinions, just like on the other platforms mentioned. By all accounts, LinkedIn is a space of appearance, a

place where minds meet, and a public forum. The difference with this one is that its discourse, we presume, will be constricted to yield results.

For one, we can see that LinkedIn's policy regarding violence is the most stringent that we have thus far seen: "We don't allow threatening or inciting violence of any kind. We don't allow individuals or groups that engage in or promote violence, property damage, or organized criminal activity. You may not use LinkedIn to express support for such individuals or groups or to otherwise glorify violence" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). Compared directly to Twitter, which seemed to be the most restrictive of violent speech thus far, LinkedIn takes this slightly further. Whereas Twitter restricts violent threats and targeted harassment, LinkedIn categorically bans violence by saying that it does not allow "individuals or groups that engage in or promote violence" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). This means that violence or the support of violent behavior – even if it is not directed at someone or some group in particular – is not tolerated on LinkedIn. This marks LinkedIn as the least protective of speech as it pertains to violence. As it says later in the LinkedIn Professional Community Policies, those who moderate LinkedIn "require content to be professionally relevant and on topic" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). Violence, then, must be inherently unrelated to the professional discourse, in LinkedIn's philosophy.

Regarding hate speech, LinkedIn's Professional Community Policies say something similar to what one would find on any of the other public forums mentioned: "We don't allow content that attacks, denigrates, intimidates, dehumanizes, incites or threatens hatred, violence, prejudicial or discriminatory action against individuals or groups because of their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or disability status. Hate groups are not permitted on LinkedIn. Do not use

racial, religious, or other slurs that incite or promote hatred, or any other content intended to create division" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). Again, this is similar to what is seen in the other sites' expectations. Perhaps one noteworthy distinction comes about between LinkedIn and Facebook here though, in that Facebook (and perhaps Twitter) protects individuals from hate speech and harassment, whereas LinkedIn extends the protections to groups as well. This is a minor difference, but nonetheless, this rule shows once again that LinkedIn, as a public forum, is a bit narrower than others.

Another component that shapes the content found on LinkedIn is its treatment of misinformation. Here is the what LinkedIn has to say on the matter: "Do not share content in a way that you know is, or think may be, misleading or inaccurate, including misinformation or disinformation. Do not share content to interfere with or improperly influence an election or another civic process. We may prevent you from posting content from sites that are known to produce or contain misinformation. Do not share content that directly contradicts guidance from leading global health organizations and public health authorities. Do not post content that denies a well-documented historical event such as the Holocaust or slavery. Do not share false content or information, including news stories, that present untrue facts or events as though they are true or likely true. Do not post 'deepfake' images or videos of others or otherwise post content that has been manipulated to deceive" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). There are many components of this policy that are interesting diversions from what we would see in the guidelines of other social media sites.

For one, the disclaimer that LinkedIn may prevent users from posting content from sites that are known to produce misinformation seems unique. It seems like a categorical ban on links to certain other sites that LinkedIn deems untrustworthy, but there is no indicator of what the

criteria are that LinkedIn would use to make such a significant judgment. It also forbids presenting untruths as true or potentially true. Like Twitter, it must view lying and falsehood as inherently bad, but there is less information to use to draw the conclusion of why precisely LinkedIn takes this position, or what it will do in the event that someone should engage in it. Perhaps it leaves this part of the policy undefined in the public eye so that it has more liberty to make case-by-case decisions. It leaves room for unjust abuse of power on the part of LinkedIn – the party responsible for mediation of the forum – which is a reflection of the fact that LinkedIn does not see itself as a facilitator of the public discourse as much as other sites, even though the features of the platform – posts, groups, etc. – would allow for it to be.

Most indicative of how LinkedIn creates a space of appearance is exactly how it speaks to users in its policies. Whereas other sets of guidelines we've thus far examined have been rationalistic, speaking to users as equals and rational actors, LinkedIn does not quite do the same. Instead, it demands respect and tells its users how to *be*. In fact, its policies are divided into three categories that define how it expects its users to be: "Be safe"; "Be trustworthy"; "Be professional" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). Being safe refers to safety and lack of violence, as per the above analysis. Being trustworthy has to do with accurate personal representation. From the Policy: "We don't allow fake profiles or entities. Do not post misleading or deceptive information about yourself, your business, your qualifications, work experience, affiliations, or achievement" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). Here, LinkedIn shows that it is serious about accurate self-representation, to the point of urging that one not misrepresent oneself. As LinkedIn identifies itself as a means to the end of getting a job, it clearly does not see itself as a vessel for trying out new identities.

Finally, the expectation that most sets LinkedIn apart from other online public forums: "Be professional." Specifically, this means, from LinkedIn's perspective: "We require content to be professionally relevant and on topic, such as sharing and gaining expertise; hiring and getting hired; teaching and acquiring new skills; and engaging in actions that allow you and others to be more productive and successful" ("LinkedIn Professional Community Policies"). The first term that may strike one in this section is "relevant", for we do not see it across the other policies from social media sites. The idea of relevance implies that there are certain topics that are valuable to the conversation that LinkedIn facilitates, but also that there are those which are not. Looking at the above statement broadly, LinkedIn clearly means to say that conversation which is not related to the professional world has no place on its forum.

So, whereas we might consider Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to be places meant to facilitate conversation and expression, LinkedIn is not that. All four are public forums, but LinkedIn is the self-defined professional public forum. On LinkedIn, we can expect that the political realm is represented in only the personalities that serve individual betterment. That does not preclude LinkedIn from being a public forum or an authentic political space, however. People who use LinkedIn may do so for its instrumental purposes, true. However, they still use it to cultivate the way in which they may appear to others. They have the right to choose which experiences to share. They can show the world who they are by liking posts that most accurately reflect their values, because the fact of the matter is that even if all the content found on LinkedIn is professionally relevant, some of that content will be more inspiring, more interesting, or more relevant to those users. In other words, what is relevant to the world of LinkedIn is still a far larger circle than that which will be relevant to any given individual. That person's ability to

show what is relevant to them is what makes LinkedIn a political space, as Arendt conceived of

them. Granted, it may be a narrower political space, but it is one nonetheless.

And what of the interests of the people of LinkedIn? Unfortunately, LinkedIn's statistics

cannot be found up-to-date online at this time, but a December 27, 2019 post from LinkedIn

shows us what the most followed pages were at that time:

Table 4: Most Followed LinkedIn Pages

Rank	Page	Millions of Followers
1	TED Conferences	12.5
2	Google	12.1
3	Amazon	8.6
4	LinkedIn	8.2
5	Microsoft	7.8
6	IBM	6.4
7	Unilever	6.2
8	Nestlé	6.0
9	Accenture	4.4
10	Facebook	4.4

(Lessard)

While individuals can be followed on LinkedIn, this data suggests that the most followed

accounts belonged to corporations at the time of this post. This is unique so far, based on our

data, with respect to other social media. Whereas Instagram and Twitter appear dominated by

individuals, LinkedIn is dominated by companies, save for TED Conferences, a platform for self-

help and the sharing of information. This is not surprising, given LinkedIn's commitment to

professional connections, but it is nonetheless a reflection of the fact that LinkedIn is less of a

place to curate individual expression as other forms of social media. That does not preclude it

from being a public forum, however, it just means that LinkedIn is a platform on which the

political discourse is limited; it is meant to shape its users' political experiences in a specific,

professional way.

Sub-Section 5: Reddit

All of these forums have their unique aspects, but one major similarity across all of them

is that they have exhaustive centralized guidelines. One major social media platform – and

perhaps the most open public forum of them all – has just a scant set of rules that govern its

entire user base: Reddit. Reddit describes itself as "home to thousands of communities, endless

conversation, and authentic human connection." The mission statement continues, "Whether

you're into breaking news, sports, TV fan theories, or a never-ending stream of the internet's

cutest animals, there's a community on Reddit for you" ("Content Policy – Reddit"). Reddit does

not have a centralized conversation; the discourse on the site is primarily done in groups called

"Subreddits" – the communities referenced in the mission statement – although users can post as

themselves if they would like These Subreddits operate not too differently than Facebook

groups; however, the implication we can derive right away from the structure of Reddit is that

posts are typically categorized, and therefore are less freeform than what one might see in a feed

on different social media.

Reddit has a set of eight rules that govern interaction on its site, all of which are brief. While some link out to full-length paragraphs, they all offer less overall length than what can be seen on other sites. One of these rules pertains to safety and violence: "Remember the human. Reddit is a place for creating community and belonging, not for attacking marginalized or vulnerable groups of people. Everyone has a right to use Reddit free of harassment, bullying, and threats of violence. Communities and users that incite violence or that promote hate based on identity or vulnerability will be banned" ("Content Policy – Reddit"). The phrase that most indicates Reddit's attitude toward its users is the first sentence: *remember the human*. This informal way to say respect others suggests that Reddit operators view the app's users as friends, or at least that they would like to be perceived as if they do. Otherwise, the rule seems in line with what else has been discussed regarding other forums, with the possible note that Reddit here reserves the right to ban entire communities if they are fundamentally hateful or violent.

Consider also Reddit's policy on self-representation: "You don't have to use your real name to use Reddit, but don't impersonate an individual or an entity in a misleading or deceptive manner" ("Content Policy – Reddit"). As with Twitter and Instagram, on Reddit, one need not use one's own name. In fact, however, on Reddit, it is normal not to use one's own name. Reddit thrives on anonymity for success, as the most popular Subreddits involve sharing things that one might not be emboldened to attach their names to: asking questions that might have them viewed as unintelligent or weird in the physical world, expressing discontent about their work lives, and generally saying things that others are not saying.

Regarding misinformation, Reddit does not have a policy about it whatsoever. This is noteworthy because Reddit considers itself a platform for discussion and debate. Could it be that Reddit is apathetic toward the spread of misinformation? It seems more likely to be the case that

there is not an overarching misinformation policy because Reddit places a high intelligence value

on its users. Among the most popular Subreddits are communities regarding science and

learning, and, further, one of the only eight rules that Reddit applies across the whole platform is:

"Don't break the site or do anything that interferes with normal use of Reddit" ("Content Policy

– Reddit"). The paragraph version of this rule reveals that *breaking the site* refers to disrupting

the very code of the website. Reddit explicitly states that users should not do this, whereas no

other site we have examined does the same. By making this one of the few ground rules for the

use of the site, Reddit makes it clear that it believes that its users hacking the site seems like a

possibility. So, perhaps Reddit makes no attempt to ban misinformation because it sees its users

as intelligent enough to see through attempts at deception. Moreover, Subreddits develop their

own guidelines as well, so it is possible that Reddit wants to leave the question of

misinformation up to those moderating individual communities.

Overall, it seems that Reddit is a space of appearance unique to the rest of them. It offers

a world of anonymity that allows users to create personalities that only correlate to their physical

selves in how it reflects one's interests. In the normalization of anonymity, Reddit offers users

the ability to engage and be seen exactly as they would like. On Reddit, science is popular, and

the political interaction that happens is unabated by rules that limit it. Its structure may allow for

increased misinformation, as it does not categorically address it in its guidelines, and as the

normalization of anonymity means no one need be associated with any false statements they

make. Conversely, the anonymity and relaxed rules may mean that the discourse found on Reddit

is particularly authentic to the hidden interests and curiosities of many.

Finally, let us consider the ways in which Reddit is used. Reddit is used predominantly

through the lens of Subreddits, and the most popular Subreddits are listed as follows:

Table 5: Most Populous Subreddits

Rank	Name	Millions of Subscribers
1	r/announcements	143.0
2	r/funny	39.9
3	r/AskReddit	36.0
4	r/gaming	32.1
5	r/aww	30.8
6	r/Music	29.8
7	r/pics	28.5
8	r/science	27.8
9	r/worldnews	27.6
10	r/videos	26.6

("The 31 Biggest Subreddits")

These communities reflect that on Reddit, interests are categorized, and the use of Reddit is noticeably different from the other sites we've thus far discussed. On this list, nothing pertains directly to individuals, whereas there are Subreddits devoted to individuals, which could have made this list in theory. Further, none of these categories pertain to corporations, and there is no interest shown in sports. Instead, this list demonstrates a wide variety of topics, many of which might be exclusively for discourse. Specifically, the third-ranked community, "AskReddit", is an open forum, self-described as such: "r/AskReddit is the place to ask and answer thought-provoking questions" ("r/AskReddit"). It hosts questions that might just be set up to create a dialogue, an example of which being a question from today: "What's normal when a guy does it, but sexualized when a woman does it?" It can also feature asking for random, trivial opinions

that, while perhaps having interesting answers, one might not want one's name attached to:

"Your toilet is now sentient. Would you prefer it to passionately, exuberantly crave your

excrement, or deeply resent and despise you for what you do to it? Why?" Both questions

included in this paragraph were featured in today's popular "AskReddit" posts, each with over

15 thousand upvotes (meaning that 15 thousand more people liked the question than disliked it).

The dichotomy represents the breadth of the category.

  In any case, Reddit clearly views itself as a collection of forums, and a contributor to the

public discourse in various ways. All the above communities involve categorized sharing,

asking, and answering, in such a way that a dialogue is bound to follow the majority of

compelling posts.

Section 6

Conclusion

In summary, speech is an integral part of the human existence, as Hannah Arendt described It is not to be taken for granted, however, and the reality is that in many parts of the world, it is not a guarantee. Nonetheless, in the United States, speech is protected largely in accordance with the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, and because of this, it has had the ability to expand and shift in the way that it is had.

In the United States today, the political world is more than ever experienced physically by oneself. As Hannah Arendt described the political, it was the space of discourse, of self-expression, of choosing how we are and how we might be perceived by others. Today, that aspect of life in the United States is experienced through social media, in ways that differ from platform to platform. Each of the ones discussed in this paper – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Reddit – operates uniquely as a space of appearance and platform for speech.

Facebook is a place of diverse topics and voices, assembled for a variety of forms of expression. Facebook constructs its platform that appeals to the user's rationality and desire to participate in discourse. It partners with independent fact-checkers to restrict its own influence in the limitation of speech, and also places great significance on the effects of harm. It also requires that users present themselves in only one way, which is meant to be holistic. In doing these things, Facebook cultivates a space of appearance that draws a base of users with diverse interests, but one in which it is normal to participate only as one is already perceived outside of the platform.

Instagram presents itself as a place of individualism. With an approach to speech that treats users as friends and creators, Instagram thinly shields that its governing philosophies are

similar to those of Facebook, in that they prioritize the minimization of harm. Instagram, though, does not profess as strong a commitment to fight misinformation, and also takes a more open stance regarding the way that users identify themselves. With increased anonymity on Instagram via the use of a username instead of one's real name, Instagram users can create multiple accounts and share multiple takes on themselves: especially one that demonstrates personal highlights, and occasionally, in the case of the "finsta", a more private account that reveals more intimate, nuanced expression to a smaller, trusted group. Hence, Instagram is a space of appearance with stances on speech and expression that help to form a user base that focuses on individuals and entertainment, with users being more interested in entertaining individuals than anything else.

Twitter commits itself to the good of the public forum directly, as Facebook does, but Twitter limits users to short statements and posts. It also grants less protection to speech that may be construed as violent or misleading, but, like Instagram, does not require that one use one's exact real name. In doing these things, Twitter deviates from the Millian principles that have oft overseen discourse in the United States, and it constructs an Arendtian political space that allows one to craft one's own identity. The format of the site, with Tweets being brief, compresses discourse and asks the speakers on the forum to refine their thoughts before sending them. Twitter's structure, with all of these factors under consideration, yields an interest in individual voices, but a mixture of those meant to entertain and those who voice opinions on societal issues.

LinkedIn serves as a public forum whose end goal is to facilitate conversation that will lead to the progression of the professional world. With speech restricted to interactions that yield growth, LinkedIn goes beyond considerations of harm when considering what speech it will allow, and in that way, it is based far less on Mill's expectations for the public. It also requires

that users define themselves with precision, based on what they have done, as much as where their interests lie. In terms of Arendt, this means that the political participation that occurs on LinkedIn is in the limited space that allows them to give description to the experiences that they have had over the courses of their careers. So, LinkedIn is a restricted public forum that offers limited self-expression, with respect to other social media sites.

Finally, Reddit is more of a set of public forums than a singular forum. It has a scant set of rules that give users the right to create their own communities with separate expectations from one another. Among those few all-encompassing rules, however, involve rules against harm and abuse, but not against misinformation. This might mark Reddit as the most in line with the principles put forth by Mill, who believed that falsehood could be eliminated from the discourse over time, by intelligent actors and a considerate audience. Reddit also allows users to define themselves as they wish, yielding a norm of anonymity that creates discourse on the site that reflects users' willingness to learn, unburdened by the awkwardness of first admitted that they lack knowledge on a given subject.

Each of these social media platforms operates in the spirit of a public forum. Each has a unique approach to speech – speech that may be insidious, speech that may be incorrect or even deceitful, speech that may be harmful, speech that creates the space of public appearance for people online across the world. None of the social media forums is the ultimate authority on speech, and each invites people to present themselves in different ways and engage politically with the rest of the world. Whereas the United States government is bound to make very limited judgment on the value of speech, these sites, being privately owned, may experiment with the guidelines they establish. This experimentation, at least for now, cultivates the political experience of users in the United States and across much of the world.

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University   **University Park, PA**
College of the Liberal Arts | Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy | Bachelor of Arts in Political Science   *Class of 2022*

WORK EXPERIENCE

Employment with Penn State Learning   **University Park, PA**
Public Speaking Mentor   *Jan. 2020 – Present*
- Using interpersonal skills to convey advanced speaking techniques to peers.
- Developing the ideation of clients by staying open-minded and finding a balance between formulaic speaking and their individual creative flair.

Employment with Penn State Political Science Department   **University Park, PA**
Research Assistant   *May 2021 – Aug. 2021*
- Used research skills to search and compile data from Nexis Uni, Google Scholar, and numerous other databases regarding the recruitment practices of militant rebel and terrorist groups across the world.

Employment with McCormick Law Firm   **Williamsport, PA**
Intern   *Jun. 2020 – Aug. 2020*
- Became familiar with legal procedure and documentation, especially in cases related to civil litigation, real estate law, and worker's compensation law.
- Attended phone hearings and assisted with related case analysis.
- Utilized research skills to aid in the development of legal briefs and cases, as well as case summaries.
- Confronted the challenges and alterations made by the pandemic with respect to the workplace and the legal process.

Employment with Mifflinburg Area Park and Pool   **Mifflinburg, PA**
Head Lifeguard | Lifeguard | Water Safety Instructor   *May 2016 – Aug. 2020*
- Oversaw operations, recorded financial transactions, and coordinated staff compliance.
- Ensured adherence to CDC, Pennsylvania Department of Health, and Borough of Mifflinburg health protocols regarding COVID-19 safety.
- Learned and enforced rules and underwent lifeguard training to maintain a safe, controlled pool environment.
- Underwent training to become a Water Safety Instructor and taught swimming fundamentals to swimmers of various ability levels.

OTHER LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVITIES

Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity   **University Park, PA**
President | Treasurer | Recruitment Chair   *Jan. 2019 – Present*
- Leading executive board in making reasoned decisions through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, culminating in our recently being awarded Phi Sigma Pi's Sanders P. McComsey Most Improved Old Chapter Award in 2021.
- Presiding over fraternity meetings and carrying out social justice initiatives to ensure the growth of the membership as leaders in the greater Penn State community.
- Managed finances of the fraternity, including dues payments, budgets, and working with university officials to properly account for monetary transactions.
- Worked to further develop the fraternity and using social skills to recruit new members to the fraternity.

Penn State Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon (THON)   **University Park, PA**
Supply Logistics Captain | Fundraising Participant | Dancer Relations Committee Member | PR Liaison   *Jan. 2019 – Present*
- Managing inventory and coordinating communications about supplies for the largest student-run philanthropy in the world.
- Attending and contributing to fundraisers and events, the proceeds of which are sent to families struggling with pediatric cancer.
- Providing emotional and physical support for THON dancers in not sitting nor sleeping for 46 hours in the dance marathon.
- Helping to spread awareness for THON by assisting the aforementioned dancers with press interviews.

Schreyer Honors College   **University Park, PA**
Scholar   *Jan. 2020 – Present*
- Taking on additional undergraduate coursework to gain and maintain acceptance into Honors College via Penn State's Paterno Fellow Program.
- Developing time management skills to prepare to write a thesis paper of high caliber.

SKILLS, HONORS, AND INTERESTS

- **Skills:** Proficient in Microsoft Office Suite, Adobe Creative Cloud, and Internet research on Nexis Uni and other platforms.
- **Honors:** Phi Beta Kappa membership, Mortar Board National Honor Society membership, President's Freshman Award, Provost Award, Dean's List every semester.
- **Interests:** Ethics, charity, soccer, tennis, football, theater, chorus, ukulele, Penn State athletics.