Engagement and Surveillance: A Digital Utopia in the Platform Age

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Abstract: The advent of the platform era has injected vitality into global economic development, cultural production, and social life, giving rise to a new type of economic and cultural ecosystem: the global trade flow facilitated by the platform economy in a connected time-space; The platform fosters audience engagement in content production, thereby invigorating the innovative development of Chinese culture and fostering international exchanges. Moreover, the platform's robust data processing capabilities ensure the advancement of smart city construction and offer individuals more convenient and intelligent services. However, in the era of platforms driven by mobility and participation, there are not only opportunities for economic and cultural development but also challenges such as personal privacy breaches and property infringements due to data security concerns. Additionally, algorithmic mechanisms may lead to invisible social biases, while the use of artificial intelligence can generate false news and disrupt the global information order. Therefore, "digital welfare" in this platform era necessitates a dialectical analysis that emphasizes constructing a networked community based on mutual learning and inclusiveness of civilizations to provide valuable insights.

Keywords: platform era; Participation culture; Algorithm monitoring; Data security

1. Introduction

In the current turbulent world, we find ourselves in a phase of economic revival and recovery, confronted with the task of promoting Chinese-style modernization and consolidating the achievements made in poverty alleviation. From a global perspective, the international landscape is also grappling with challenges posed by warfare and crises. Therefore, addressing the issue of development, ensuring global security and stability, and enhancing intercultural communication and exchanges pose formidable challenges that lie before us.

Presently, information technology's rapid advancement has propelled us from an era dominated by mass communication to one characterized by platforms. Henceforth, it becomes imperative to explore the defining features of this platform era - will it infuse new vigor into global economic development as well as cultural prosperity and exchanges? Moreover, what risks and challenges does it entail? Consequently, this paper aims to analyze and discuss these aspects comprehensively.

2. The Internet of Everything: From the mass era to the platform era

Transitioning from the mass era to the platform era, we can observe the interconnectedness of the world through geographical communication, spanning from Columbus' discovery of the New World to today's seamless integration of time and space. Geographical communication relies on robust transportation infrastructure, while global temporal and spatial integration is contingent upon rapid advancements in information and communication technology as well as media technology.[1]

Language, writing, printing, newspapers, television, and now the Internet have all shaped societal structures in tandem with evolving media technologies. In the era of mass communication, traditional media wields absolute power in controlling the dissemination of meaning and shaping public perception through industrialized production of significance.[2]As Marcuse aptly pointed out, during this period, audiences are mere "one-way people," whose interpretation of meaning is solely guided by opinion leaders, thereby serving the interests of large-scale industrial capitalism in organizing social consumption. Nowadays, advancements in media technology have introduced new forms of media and given rise to the emergence of "media platforms" as a novel organizational structure characterized by data-driven

approaches, mobility, and active participation. Its platforms encompass social media, streaming media, and logistics, enabling audiences to actively participate in cultural production and empowering them with a dominant position. This fosters the diversified flow of meaning compared to traditional media. Moreover, its business model embodies the characteristics of digital capitalism through customization and rapid feedback.[3]

Undoubtedly, network platforms have provided ordinary individuals with an expressive space while promoting the dissemination of multiple interpretations. Consequently, what transformations have platform media brought about in other societal domains?

3. A new social ecology in the platform era

A novel social ecology has emerged in the platform era, characterized by data-driven, participatory and fluid features that infuse fresh vitality into global trade flows, cultural diversity exchanges between nations and people's quality of life improvements.

3.1. Time and Space Connectivity: Trade flows in a platform economy

Trade flows in the platform economy benefit from robust digital infrastructure development. In recent years, China has made significant investments in nationwide 5G base stations and Internet of Things facilities, as well as scientific research and funding for urban and rural areas in the central and western regions. This accelerated construction has elevated the level of digital villages, contributing to the promotion of Chinese-style modernization during poverty alleviation efforts and comprehensive rural modernization.

Agriculture serves as the foundation of our nation, with China's historical roots deeply embedded in its agricultural heritage. In this era of mathematical platforms, leveraging science and technology for precision large-scale agricultural product development, utilizing platform network interconnection and e-commerce models for national agricultural product sales, along with supply chain integration are advantageous strategies within the platform economy framework. Zhaotong apples from Yunnan Province exemplify southern apple varieties. While their sweet, red, crisp characteristics were previously known by local communities nearby, limited publicity hindered their market expansion. However, in recent years villagers have learned to utilize platforms such as Tiktok for live broadcasting purposes which enabled them to showcase every step of original rural production process resulting in increased sales revenue - providing villagers with a new means to continuously enhance their income levels.

The global trade connectivity platform has emerged as a significant driving force not only in rural revitalization and other domains, but also in facilitating the development of the "Belt and Road" initiative. According to David Harvey, advancements in information technology have compressed time and space, enabling individuals to perceive the seamless flow of time and space at a sensory level. The integration provided by platform connectivity has injected momentum into cross-border e-commerce trade between China and countries along the "Belt and Road," thereby facilitating flexible movement of goods, funds, services, and personnel while establishing an efficient digital Silk Road.

3.2. Participation in culture: the innovative development and exchange of fine traditional Chinese culture

The participation culture of the platform fosters an environment where audiences actively engage in independent content production.[4]In recent years, both professional and non-professional users have contributed to the content production on new streaming media platforms, leading to cultural exchanges and collisions. Within this context, traditional Chinese culture has also undergone multiple creative transformations and innovative developments within audience-driven cultural productions.

For instance, the bilibili website hosts a short video titled "Escape from the British Museum," which showcases traditional culture through the lens of two self-media bloggers. Upon its upload, this video went viral and garnered recognition and shares from mainstream media outlets like CCTV. This exemplifies how young individuals and non-professionals can engage in innovative creation within the platform era, gaining widespread acknowledgement and resonance.

In recent years, numerous outstanding film and television adaptations based on online characters have also generated fervent discussions and acclaim on international platforms. Works such as "Know whether you should be Green and Fat or Red and Thin" and "Nirvana in Fire" ignited heated debates on overseas

social platform Instagram, piquing foreign netizens' interest in and affection for traditional Chinese culture. The narrative of Mountains and Seas has sparked extraordinary conversations on internet-based media platforms as well. Overseas netizens discuss China's reformative journey along with the genuine kindness embodied by its people, thus constructing an authentic three-dimensional portrayal of China.

3.3. Wisdom and Insight: Building a Smart City through Data Interconnectivity

The construction of smart cities not only enhances economic exchanges and cultural development but also significantly improves residents' quality of life experience, thanks to the data-driven functions of the platform. By leveraging the data processing capabilities of the logistics platform, Shenzhen's city brain can analyze and calculate traffic conditions during morning and evening peak hours, enabling rational allocation of bus departure times and ensuring both traffic safety and travel efficiency for residents.

In Zhejiang Province, the integration of data technology and the construction of a government service platform provide residents with highly efficient management of government services. During the Hangzhou Asian Games, the "Asian Games GovHK" program jointly launched by the government and Alipay offers immediate access to information about the games and surrounding services for people. Its bilingual mode also provides convenient and user-friendly services for a larger number of foreigners visiting Hangzhou, enhancing the convenience of a smart city with seamless data connectivity.

4. Hidden risks in the digital utopia

Despite the convenience brought by the platform era, we must confront crises such as data security issues, social biases embedded within algorithmic mechanisms, and the disruption of global information order caused by AI-generated false news.

4.1. Data security: safeguarding personal privacy and property

The platform relies on data for user analysis and prediction. In recent years, the increasing occurrence of electronic financial fraud and numerous instances of personal information leakage have raised concerns about data security. For instance, criminals exploit user information obtained from the platform to engage in sophisticated manipulation and forgery for monetary fraud, as well as more recently, transnational telecommunications fraud through social media platforms.

Therefore, it is crucial to enhance media literacy in order to cultivate a sense of self-protection regarding personal data information. Moreover, governmental authorities should enforce legal supervision over platforms. For instance, the European Union has implemented corresponding policy regulations to combat unlawful data collection by social media platforms targeting its citizens. Similarly, China has intensified oversight of data privacy by public security organs and promoted the rule of law. In order to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of individuals in the digital era, platforms themselves must fulfill their corporate and societal responsibilities and collaboratively construct a secure cyberspace.

4.2. Algorithm mechanism: invisible social bias

The algorithm refers to the platform's calculation program, which determines the order of information presented to the audience. Its mechanism enables it to sort through thousands of data points. In recent years, Facebook has faced repeated accusations of manipulating the visibility of candidate information and exhibiting biased news during the US election. Similarly, platforms like Instagram have been criticized for racial bias and other issues in their recommendation algorithms for photo sequences.

While acknowledging the existence of algorithmic black boxes, it is crucial to recognize that platform algorithms not only perpetuate social biases but also exacerbate them. Furthermore, personalized recommendations tailored to individual user needs reinforce the layers of algorithmic cocooning, ultimately leading to a narrow personal perspective and frequent instances of group polarization. Hence, it is imperative for platforms to construct their algorithmic mechanisms in a scientific and rational manner while consciously embracing government oversight. Platforms should proactively document their key core algorithms and continuously explore fairness and reasonableness within their algorithmic frameworks.

4.3. Fake news: Disruption of the global information order

The advent of large-scale generative artificial intelligence, such as ChatCPT, offers a more convenient means for data collection and processing. On one hand, within the realm of news production, journalists can use these platforms to acquire and integrate information in order to enhance efficiency. However, on the other hand, an incessant influx of fake news is also emerging. This year, the reports regarding the alleged murder of eight railway workers in Shanxi Province gained substantial traction on social media until authorities verified that it was unfounded. Internationally, there is mounting apprehension and disquietude caused by an artificially generated video utilizing AI technology which portrays Zelensky's capitulation. This occurrence effectively illustrates the chaotic condition prevailing within today's global information sphere as a result of digital advancements in this age dominated by online platforms.

In the contemporary era, upholding journalistic ethics and professionalism is of utmost importance as it serves as a crucial guarantee for global journalistic security. Just as the technology itself is not the issue, but rather the individuals who utilize it, enhancing public discernment and analysis while regulating platform owners, developers, and users becomes indispensable.

5. Risk dispersion: the key to overcoming challenges in both "danger" and "opportunity"

As Beck stated, individuals within the risk society reside on the precipice of civilization, venturing into an unpredictable realm.[5] Addressing the risks presented by the platform era necessitates a threefold approach: technical governance, data governance, and ethical governance. This will enable effective coordination between humanity and technology.

5.1. Subject accountability: the establishment and enhancement of the data security management mechanism

Currently, with data becoming a new factor of production, its deep integration with technological advancements is driving the rapid development of the platform communication era. However, we cannot overlook the personal privacy and data information security challenges faced when personal information is ubiquitously collected.

Countries worldwide are actively addressing issues arising from malicious applications and infringements related to advanced synthesis technology. China has issued the "Regulations on Management of Algorithm Recommendations for Internet Information Services" and the "Regulations on Deep Fusion Management" this year, which clearly stipulate that deep fusion service providers should assume primary responsibility for information security, establish comprehensive user registration systems to fulfill their management obligations in accordance with the law, and refrain from providing biometric information editing functions such as facial recognition without individuals' consent. Similarly, both the European Union and the United States have enacted relevant laws to protect user data security in order to safeguard citizens' information privacy. Therefore, establishing and enhancing data security management mechanisms is crucial for upholding and advancing cybersecurity.

5.2. Technical support: algorithm optimization and development of man-machine cooperation

With the implementation and promotion of the law, it is imperative for the technology platform to continuously enhance its algorithm mechanism in order to minimize algorithm bias during user information recommendation. For complex synthesized content on the platform, clear identification markers should be applied to avoid confusion among users. Additionally, disclosure and management rules need to be established, utilizing algorithms for content moderation and constructing a signature database for identifying illegal and undesirable information. Service providers involved in deep synthesis must maintain records of any identified illegal or undesirable content and promptly report them to the network information department. By optimizing technology and fostering humanistic care from technicians and managers, we aim to create a harmonious era of symbiotic man-machine cooperation.

5.3. Data literacy: Engage in the critical analysis of cultural representation

The era of digital platforms enables widespread participation in the expression and interaction on online platforms. Amidst the overwhelming amount of public discourse, diverse information and ideologies are presented to individuals, who seemingly possess an expanded power to engage with these

representations. However, they also become deeply entangled in monitoring and manipulation by various technological platforms. It is crucial for us to critically deconstruct the multifaceted representations within this participatory culture. Simultaneously, we must enhance our data literacy skills and raise awareness about personal data security protection. We should not blindly trust network information but instead improve our ability to discern truth from falsehoods while refraining from spreading rumors or engaging in technology-enabled violations of others' rights. Only through such efforts can we collectively construct a fair, inclusive, and open community for network security that serves humanity's common destiny.

6. Conclusions

The era of platforms has facilitated a comprehensive interconnectedness of social life, with the integration of digitalization and platformization deeply ingrained in our daily existence. However, beneath this idealistic creation lie concerns regarding data ethics, security, and the potential alienation of human emotions and labor. In this age of rapid acceleration, these areas necessitate particular attention. The establishment of a community of shared future in cyberspace poses a formidable challenge to the world, as it is intricately linked to the interconnected fate of humanity. Furthermore, ensuring cyber security and reshaping the global information order will foster diverse and inclusive development within the realm of world economic civilization.

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