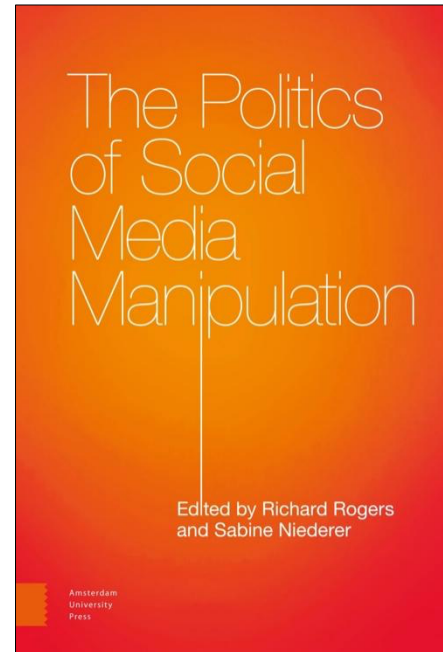Richard Rogers and Sabine Niederer (Eds.), **The Politics of Social Media Manipulation,** Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2020, 292 pp., $131.00 (hardcover).

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The realm of political communication and persuasion involves a dynamic interplay between policymakers, the media, and the significant public, all vying for attention within the public sphere. In the digital age, concerns about misinformation and disinformation have become prevalent in elections worldwide, and the Netherlands is no exception to this trend. With a focus on the Dutch electoral landscape, in *The Politics of Social Media Manipulation*, the comprehensive analysis conducted by Richard Rogers and Sabine Niederer offers valuable insight into the dissemination of political news across various social media platforms. This book is thoughtfully structured into three distinct sections. The introductory chapter sets the stage by providing context for the phenomenon of media manipulation and exploring key concepts such as misinformation, fake news, junk news, and post-truth culture, as well as their relevance in the context of the Dutch political landscape. In sections spanning from chapter 2 through chapter 7, this book explores the dissemination of political news on various prominent Dutch media platforms including Twitter, Instagram, 4chan, Reddit, and YouTube, examining both junk and traditional forms of information sharing in the course of Dutch elections. In the concluding chapter, the authors discuss the challenging situation the mainstream media is in, bring attention to the threats that come from junk news, and argue for practical strategies to counter the unhealthy spread of disinformation.

Based on empirical evidence drawn from qualitative and quantitative analysis of media content from diverse platforms, Rogers and Niederer argue that the mainstream media is facing substantial challenges, which is causing a certain level of moral panic among the mass population. Particularly, the proliferation of social media manipulation, driven by advanced data analytics and political bots, poses a significant threat to the information environment. It creates skepticism, polarizes voting populations, and undermines democratic processes. From one perspective, the abundance of low-quality information has the potential to erode the credibility of traditional social media platforms as dependable sources of political information. Moreover, the dissemination of false or misleading news, especially the amplification of extreme narratives within subcultural platforms, adversely impacts the political media landscape. For instance, dissemination of disinformation involves erroneous or misleading information with a malevolent purpose to deceive or manipulate public opinion (Stahl, 2006), and the spread of junk news contains extreme, hyperpartisan, and conspiratorial content, embodying various dimensions of polarization and misinformation.

In the "post-truth" era, the news landscape is increasingly algorithm-driven and user-centric. One notable claim in this book is that YouTube has emerged as a go-to platform for those seeking alternative political viewpoints linking to other online communities like 4chan/pol/, especially within the context of political discussions. The examination of Dutch political party channels on YouTube reveals an alternative media ecosystem marked by a distinct partisan bias. This is consistent with the populist right's criticism of mainstream media for spreading "fake news." These primarily originated from hyperpartisan and prejudiced sites. The authors remark that platforms like 4chan, which are known as Internet subculture hotspots, effectively spread tendentious news articles during election campaigns and beyond.

Another remarkable insight pertains to Google's search engine's susceptibility to questionable information, particularly in the period preceding the European parliamentary and Dutch provincial elections. This susceptibility affects the visibility of information, and the sources users encounter as search engines increasingly tailor political information based on user preferences and location. When it comes to junk news, hyperpartisan sources have a greater influence on Google's search results than do sites that spread misinformation, conspiracies, or clickbait. The prevalence of hyperpartisan results varies during different research periods and is context-specific, influenced by the particular query strategy employed. A notable revelation highlights the connection between Google search results and rumors concerning the identity of political parties and their issues, underscoring the role that those extreme outcomes and false information play in user media engagement. This emphasizes the importance of understanding user preferences regarding the top results and the impact of search engine rankings. Rogers and Niederer suggest that a common challenge plaguing various media platforms is their susceptibility to foreign disinformation operations, the extensive spread of doubtful content, and the popularization of extremist pundits who fiercely denounce mainstream media for being fake news distributors.

In the Dutch political sphere, Instagram is a somewhat healthy online platform where fresh content chiefly comes from mainstream sources, suggesting that the targeted audience prefers reliable and credible sources. The book implies, however, that controversial content does occasionally surface on Instagram. A significant discovery pertains to the relationship that exists between specific sources of false information and right-wing political organizations. Additionally, a noticeable rise in troll-like actions, conspiracy websites, and junk news was observed on Twitter during the 2019 Dutch provincial and European parliamentary elections. This surge posed a challenge to the integrity of political discussions and the electoral process.

Addressing the challenge of misinformation and fake news is of paramount importance in contemporary politics, considering the serious threat it poses to democratic processes and the destructive effect it has on public trust in institutions. The empirical findings presented in this book are solid, highlighting the need for strategies that will ward off the spread of misinformation and fake news, not only in the Dutch political environment but also in a global setting that is marked by the trend of dark globalization. It is also vital to pay attention to the variety of typologies that Rogers and Niederer use in their work when it comes to querying search engines and platforms, for instance, their meticulous choice of political keywords to explore junk news in various media sites. It is indicative that fact-checking and media coverage are essential components of addressing the spread of questionable information in Dutch search engines. They serve as mechanisms for quality control and accountability, countering the influence of junk news and ensuring that

users have access to accurate and credible information. Indeed, the efforts to monitor and address polarization on social media platforms aim to find a delicate balance between upholding the principle of freedom of expression and promoting responsible management of information. Another publication, titled *Democracy and Fake News: Information Manipulation and Post-Truth Politics* (Giusti & Piras, 2020), explores related themes of media manipulation and post-truth politics through the lens of Western and Central European landscapes. Giusti & Piras (2020) clarify a few current issues about fake news and advance our knowledge of its effects on democracy. They also consider the methodological challenges associated with inquiring into misinformation. The two books may collectively help readers gain a broader picture of political media manipulation.

As the social media landscape evolves, so do media manipulation tactics. This book enhances our comprehension of the evolving role of social media in politics and offers valuable insights applicable to the contemporary global political media landscape. It serves as inspiration for scholars to continually explore emerging issues such as deepfakes, algorithmic manipulation, and the development of bots (e.g., Ganesh & Moss, 2022; Hameleers, Van Der Meer, & Dobber, 2022; Ruffo, Semeraro, Giachanou, & Rosso, 2023; Verboord, Janssen, Kristensen, & Marquart, 2023). Overall, this book features a well-structured and user-friendly layout, rendering it valuable to students, scholars, and practitioners in the fields of politics and media. It is important to underscore the pragmatic utility of this book, as the authors put forth promising and effective strategies to combat the spread of disinformation in an era marked by the rapid and widespread dissemination of information through digital channels.

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