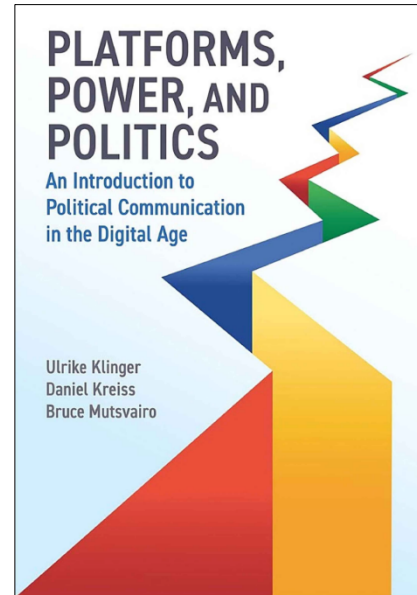


Ulrike Klinger, Daniel Kreiss, and Bruce Mutsvairo, **Platforms, Power, and Politics: An Introduction to Political Communication in the Digital Age**, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2024, 288 pp., \$26.95 (paperback).

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From whispered counsel in royal courts to algorithmic feeds in digital spheres, political communication has continually shaped collective life. While its mediums evolved from stone tablets to social platforms, the enduring essence remains: the strategic deployment of symbolic resources for persuasion, mobilization, and at times, deliberate disruption. But in the age of digital platforms, how does political communication find new expression?

In **Platforms, Power, and Politics: An Introduction to Political Communication in the Digital Age**, Ulrike Klinger, Daniel Kreiss, and Bruce Mutsvairo craft a framework that reimagines how the age-old art of political communication plays out in the digital sphere. The book reveals platforms as not just neutral spaces but influential forces—shaping, curating, and even participating in the political conversation. It highlights how platforms accommodate the creation and distribution of political narratives, how their algorithms are deliberately tuned to valorize or marginalize media content, and how they serve as regulatory bodies that shapes the fabric of political engagement from social movements to election campaigns.



This line of argument unfolds across five logically sequenced sections. The first section comprising the initial three chapters sets up the conceptual framework for the book, shedding light on the power-laden nature of the platform and its contingency on political and cultural contexts. This opens critical inquiry into how platforms weigh into political communication through an assemblage of market, intermediary, and technological powers, and examines how these platformized processes vary across different political-media environments. The second section (chapters 4–5) examines platforms and public information, exploring how digital intermediaries reshape public spheres and journalistic practices. Chapters 6–8 move to unpack how platforms reconfigure political communication for strategized purposes ranging from public diplomacy, electoral campaigns, and movement mobilization. Chapters 9–11 confront the darker implications of platform affordances, analyzing governance challenges, the proliferation of misinformation, and the rise of

¹ This research was supported by the Youth Special Project “Research on the Logical Pathways and Practical Framework of Integrating the Concept of New-Type International Relations into International Relations Curriculum” (Project No. CDCA23135).

populist, radical, and extremist political communication. The final section (chapters 12–13) explores the fusion of politics with entertainment across platforms before contemplating the future landscape of political communication in digital environments.

The book departs from a fundamental conceptualization of political communication, which according to the authors, encompasses broad symbolic expressions by political actors to construct meanings that concern the distribution of power or resources. This definition provides the analytical foundation for examining how political communication operates within platform environments, where it is shaped by underlying technological parameters, algorithmic governance, business imperatives, and regulatory frameworks that characterize the digital ecosystem. Platforms, as the authors demonstrate, are far from neutral vessels of technological rationality but are deeply embedded in social, political, cultural, and economic contexts while simultaneously wielding power through their dominance of advertising markets, gatekeeping functions, algorithmic distribution, and intermediary position between content producers and audiences.

The power embeddedness of platforms shapes digitalized political communication across both informational contexts (public deliberation and journalism) and persuasive contexts (strategic communication). Platforms inevitably undermine traditional media and elites' monopoly over news flow and public spaces. Yet, as indicated in chapter 4, this does not lead to democratization of the public information domain; rather, regrettably, it may fuel political disengagement and polarization with the effect of filter bubbles and echo chambers. In a similar vein, while platforms work to democratize news production by fostering citizen journalism and promoting more creative news presentations such as data journalism, they simultaneously undermine traditional journalism's professional values and integrity, as evidenced by the rise of clickbait journalism detailed in chapter 5.

Political communication for persuasive purposes is likewise deeply shaped by platform logic. This strategic dimension is most prominently addressed in chapter 6, which examines how political actors adapt their messaging tactics to leverage platform affordances, algorithms, and user engagement patterns to maximize persuasive impact. Taking public diplomacy as an example, while platform media facilitates diplomatic coordination of voting decisions, a more worrying repercussion is states' mobilization of bots and troll farms to intervene in electoral dynamics and referendums. Following this discussion, chapter 7 further illuminates how platforms shape democratic election campaigns by incentivizing data-driven electoral strategies that include personalized messaging, identity-based targeting, and negative campaigning. While not entirely novel, the integration of data analytics expertise has transformed elections into data-intensive industries where platform dynamics increasingly determine campaign outcomes. Chapter 8 shifts focus to social movements as less institutionalized forms of political participation, examining how platform environments foster nonlinear mobilization patterns, amplify the influence of "superspreaders," and create cross-platform dynamics. These characteristics present both opportunities for rapid mobilization and new vulnerabilities that movements must deal with in digital spaces.

The fourth line of inquiry taps into the negative impact of and the imperatives for platform governance. The authors, in chapter 9, map out the complex landscape of platform governance, highlighting how issues of privacy breaches, intellectual property violations, and algorithmic bias demand sophisticated, multitiered regulatory frameworks. While governmental oversight safeguards public values, platforms must

employ self-governance to protect users from misleading information, for which chapter 10 suggests the adoption of fact-checking practices, platform-level content moderation policies, and journalistic accountability to neutralize the impact of misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda. Another significant challenge to democracy is that platforms serve more as catalysts than deterrents, enabling populist elites to amplify their inflammatory anti-establishment narratives and anti-elitist rhetoric.

The final two chapters chart future directions in platform-based political communication research. Chapter 12 expands the boundaries of future inquiry by underscoring cultural forms—music, film, and fashion—as critical arenas for political discourse. It illuminates how these cultural elements have historically played significant yet underexplored roles in mobilizing social movements, legitimizing political leadership, and conveying political identities and values. In the concluding chapter, the authors advocate for political communication scholarship to attend more closely to visual and acoustic factors, entertainment content, and audience-generated materials that have been traditionally understudied.

While the book demonstrates the authors' considerable expertise and familiarity with the field, there appears to be a trade-off between comprehensive coverage and theoretical innovation. The authors skillfully synthesize existing literature and provide valuable overviews of key debates, yet advanced readers might find themselves wanting more robust theoretical frameworks that push beyond established paradigms. This limitation becomes particularly evident in the book's organizational structure, where chapters often function as discrete units rather than building blocks of a cohesive theoretical edifice. For experienced researchers, this creates a reading experience that occasionally feels fragmented, with certain concepts reappearing across chapters without systematic development or integration.

This limitation becomes particularly evident in chapters 6–8, where conceptual fragmentation undermines the analysis of strategic political communication on platforms. These chapters address remarkably similar phenomena—how political actors leverage platforms to promote political figures, values, identities, and policy agendas—do so through separate conceptual lenses derived from traditional disciplinary boundaries. Concepts such as political marketing, advertising, and campaigning appear across these chapters without a clear framework that articulates their relationships in the platform context. When contemporary platform practices have effectively dissolved these once-distinct domains, the book's organization continues to reflect established academic categories rather than offering a more integrated perspective. This adherence to traditional disciplinary divides represents a missed opportunity to advance theoretical understanding of platform-based political communication. Rather than developing a synthesizing framework that could bridge these related approaches or clarify their evolving distinctions in the digital era, the volume largely preserves existing scholarly compartmentalization. For a work of this scope and ambition, a more theoretically innovative approach to organizing these interconnected phenomena would have considerably enhanced its contribution to the field.

Despite these constraints, the volume remains a significant contribution to political communication scholarship—one that artfully balances theoretical depth, accessibility, and contemporary relevance. For students and scholars new to the field, it provides an exceptionally well-crafted introduction to the discipline's foundational concepts, critical debates, and emerging frontiers in our platform-mediated political environment.